History

Embellished by breathless feats of revolutionary derring-do, and plagued routinely by meddling armies of uninvited foreign invaders, Cuban history has achieved a level of importance way out of proportion to its size. Indeed, with its strategic position slap-bang in the middle of the Caribbean and its geographic closeness to its venerable (or not-so-venerable) US neighbor to the north, the historical annals of the Cuban archipelago often read more like the script of an action-packed Hollywood movie production than a dull end-of-year school exam paper. Read on.

PRE-COLUMBIAN HISTORY

According to exhaustive carbon dating, Cuba has been inhabited by humans for over 4000 years. The first known civilization to settle on the island were the Guanahatabeys, a primitive Stone Age people who lived in caves around Viñales in Pinar del Río Province and eked out a meager existence as hunter-gatherers. At some point over the ensuing 2000 years the Guanahatabeys were gradually displaced by the arrival of a new preceramic culture known as the Siboneys, a significantly more developed group of fishermen and small-scale farmers who settled down comparatively peacefully on the archipelago's sheltered southern coast.

For the most comprehensive all-round news about Cuba today click on the Havana Journal (www.havanajournal.com; in five different languages).

The island's third and most important pre-Columbian civilization, the Taínos, first started arriving in Cuba around AD 1100 in a series of waves, concluding a migration process that had begun in the Orinoco River delta in South America several centuries earlier. Taíno culture was far more developed and sophisticated than its two archaic predecessors, with the adults practicing a form of cranial transformation by flattening the soft skulls of their young children (flat foreheads were thought to be a sign of great beauty). Related to the Greater Antilles Arawaks, the new natives were skillful farmers, weavers and boatbuilders and their complex society boasted an organized system of participatory government that was overseen by series of local *caciques* or chiefs. Taínos are thought to be responsible for pioneering approximately 60% of the crops still grown in Cuba today and they were the first of the world's pre-Columbian cultures to nurture the delicate tobacco plant into a form that could easily be processed for smoking.

Despite never reaching the heights of the Aztec civilization in Mexico or the Inca civilization in South America, Cuba's Taíno culture has left its indelible mark on the island today. Cuba's traditional *guajiros* (a Taíno word meaning 'one of us,' and used to describe people from the country) still industriously work the land for a living, and evidence of native Indian ancestry in modern Cuban bloodlines remains surprisingly intact in the villages of eastern Guantánamo. Furthermore, in keeping with their tobacco-addicted predecessors, a whole generation of Cuban cigar aficionados continues to obsessively smoke *cohibas* (cigars) for their aroma and taste. To get a sniff of this all-pervading national passion you can visit cigar factories in Habana (p110) or Santa Clara (p274).

TIMELINE

AD 1100	1492
Taíno people start arriving in Cuba	Christopher Columbus discovers Cuba and names it Juana

FROM COLONY TO REPUBLIC

When Columbus neared Cuba on October 27, 1492, he described it as 'the most beautiful land human eyes had ever seen,' naming it Juana in honor of a Spanish heiress. But deluded in his search for the kingdom of the Great Khan, and finding little gold in Cuba's lush and heavily forested interior, Columbus quickly abandoned the territory in favor of Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic).

The colonization of Cuba didn't begin until nearly 20 years later in 1511 when Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar led a flotilla of four ships and 400 men from Hispaniola destined to conquer the island for the Spanish Crown. Docking near present-day Baracoa, the conquistadors promptly set about establishing seven pioneering settlements throughout their new colony, namely at Baracoa, Bayamo, Trinidad, Sancti Spíritus, Puerto Príncipe (Camagüey), Habana, and Santiago de Cuba. Watching nervously from the safety of their *bohíos* (thatched huts), a scattered population of Taíno Indians looked on with a mixture of fascination and fear.

In the United States there are 815 motor vehicles per 1000 people; in Cuba there are just 23.

Despite Velázquez's attempts to protect the local Indians from the gross excesses of the Spanish swordsmen, things quickly got out of hand and the invaders soon found that they had a full-scale rebellion on their hands. Leader of the embittered and short-lived insurgency was the feisty Hatuey, an influential Taíno *cacique* and archetype of the Cuban resistance, who was eventually captured and burned at the stake, inquisition style, for daring to challenge the iron fist of Spanish rule.

With the resistance decapitated, the Spaniards sordidly set about emptying Cuba of its relatively meager gold and mineral reserves using the beleaguered natives as forced labor. As slavery was nominally banned under a papal edict, the Spanish got around the various legal loopholes by introducing a ruthless *encomienda* system, whereby thousands of hapless natives were rounded up and forced to work for Spanish landowners on the pretext that they were receiving free 'lessons' in Christianity. The brutal system lasted 20 years before the 'Apostle of the Indians,' Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, appealed to the Spanish Crown for more humane treatment, and in 1542 the *encomiendas* were abolished. Catastrophically, for the unfortunate Taínos, the call came too late. Those who had not already been worked to death in the gold mines quickly succumbed to fatal European diseases such as smallpox and by 1550 only about 5000 scattered survivors remained.

Another great up-to-date news source is the BBC website. Click on www.bbc.co.uk and type Cuba into the search engine for a long list of recent news stories.

A Taste for Sugar

In 1522, with the local natives perishing fast, the first slaves arrived in Cuba from Africa via Hispaniola. While certainly no saints in the business of slave trafficking, the Spanish colonizers were marginally less repressive in the treatment of their African brethren than the ruthless plantation owners further north, and this, in part, has left its mark on the island's latter-day culture and music. Cuba's African slaves were kept together in tribal groups, enabling them to retain certain elements of their indigenous culture and, in contrast to their counterparts in Haiti or the United States, they retained various legal rights: to own property, get married and even buy their own freedom.

Put to work on cattle ranches, tobacco plantations and the fledgling sugar mills that had already started to spring up around the countryside, the slaves were integral to the slow and gradual growth of the Cuban economy over the ensuing 100 years from subsistence colony to grand commercial enterprise. But it wasn't all one-way traffic.

From the mid-16th century to the mid-18th century, Cuba became the nexus point for a vicious power struggle between wealthy Spanish traders on the one hand and pirates flying the Jolly Roger on the other. The bountiful booty of New World gold and silver shored up in Cuban harbors was too hard for the corsairs to resist. Santiago de Cuba was plundered in 1554 and Habana was attacked a year later leading the embattled Spaniards to construct an impressive line of fortifications around the island's most vulnerable harbors. It made little difference. By the 1660s a new generation of marauding pirates led by the wily Welsh governor of Jamaica, Henry Morgan, revealed further holes in Spain's weak naval defenses and, with Spanish power in Europe constantly under threat, the healthy economic future of the Cuban colony looked to be seriously in doubt.

Espejo de Paciencia (Mirror of Patience) written by Balboa in 1608 is considered to be the oldest Cuban literary work.

In 1762 Spain joined in the Seven Years' War on the side of France against the British. For Cuba it quickly turned out to be a fatal omen. Unperturbed by their new Spanish foes and sensing an opportunity to disrupt trade in Spain's economically lucrative Caribbean empire, 20,000 British troops homed in on Habana, landing in the small village of Cojímar on June 6 and attacking and capturing the seemingly impregnable castle of El Morro from the rear. Worn down and under siege the Spanish reluctantly surrendered Habana two months later, leaving the British to become the city's (and Cuba's) rather unlikely new overlords.

The British occupation turned out to be brief but incisive. Bivouacking themselves inside Habana's formidable city walls for 11 months, the enterprising English flung open the doors to free trade and sparked a new rush of foreign imports into the colony in the form of manufacturing parts and consumer goods. Not surprisingly, it was the sugar industry that benefited most from this economic deregulation and in the years that followed the British handover (they swapped Habana for Florida at the Treaty of Paris in 1763) the production of sugarcane boomed like never before.

Cuba's railway system first became operational in 1837. Colonizing power Spain didn't get a railway system until 11 years later.

The industry got a further stimulus in the 1790s when a bloody slave rebellion on the neighboring island of Haiti led 30,000 French planters to flee west and seek asylum in Cuba. Well-skilled in the intricacies of sugar and coffee production, the new immigrants quickly mastered the island's difficult terrain and built a series of pioneering coffee *cafétales* (estates) in the mountainous regions of Pinar del Río and the Sierra Maestra. The influx of Gallic culture also permeated Cuban music, furniture, architecture and manners, particularly in the intrinsically 'French' cities of Cienfuegos, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. See the boxed text, p267 for further details.

By the 1820s, Cuba was the world's largest sugar producer and the freshly inaugurated United States – hooked on sugar and spice and all things nice – was its most prestigious market. Indeed, so important was Cuban sugar to the American palate that a growing movement inside

1508 Sebastián de Ocampo circumnavigates Cuba, proving it's an island and not part of Asia as Columbus thought

1511 Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar lands at Baracoa; Cuba's first rebel Hatuey is burned at the stake

1522 First slaves arrive in Cuba from Africa

1607 Habana declared capital of Cuba

the US started petitioning the government for annexation of the island during the 19th century. In 1808 Thomas Jefferson became the first of four US presidents to offer to buy Cuba from its increasingly beleaguered Spanish owners and in 1845 President Polk upped the ante further when he slapped down a massive US$100 million bid for the jewel of the Caribbean.

In 1824 priest Félix Varela published an independent newspaper called *El Habanero* in Philadelphia. It was considered to be the first Cuban revolutionary publication.

For better or for worse, Spain refused to sell, preferring instead to import more slaves and bank more pesetas. By 1840 there were 400,000 slaves incarcerated on the island, the bulk of them of West African origin.

On the political front the sugar boom went some way in forestalling the formation of a coherent independence movement in Cuba before 1820. Curiously, Cuba played little part in the sweeping liberation of South America spearheaded by Simón Bolívar in the 1820s, preferring instead to stay loyal to the Spanish Crown – along with Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Nonetheless, the rumblings of discontent wouldn't be long in coming.

The War for Independence

Fed up with Spain's reactionary policies and enviously eyeing Lincoln's new American dream to the north, *criollo* (Spaniards born in the Americas) landowners around Bayamo began plotting rebellion in the late 1860s. The spark was auspiciously lit on October 10, 1868, when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a budding poet, lawyer and sugar plantation owner, launched an uprising from his Demajagua sugar mill near Manzanillo in the Oriente (see p384). Calling for the abolition of slavery, and freeing his own slaves in an act of solidarity, Céspedes proclaimed the famous *Grito de Yara,* a cry of liberty for an independent Cuba, encouraging other disillusioned separatists to join him. For the colonial administrators in Habana such a bold and audacious bid to wrest control from their incompetent and slippery grasp was an act tantamount to treason. The furious Spanish reacted accordingly.

For the most comprehensive book on Cuban history in English check out Hugh Thomas' *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. It may be 35 years old but it's still a classic.

Fortuitously, for the loosely organized rebels, the cagey Céspedes had done his military homework. Within weeks of the historic *Grito de Yara* the diminutive lawyer turned general had raised an army of over 1500 men and marched defiantly on Bayamo, taking the city in a matter of days. But initial successes soon turned to lengthy deadlock. A tactical decision not to invade western Cuba along with an alliance between *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in Spain but living in Cuba) and the Spanish soon put Céspedes on the back foot. Temporary help arrived in the shape of mulato general Antonio Maceo, a tough and uncompromising Santiagüero nicknamed the 'Bronze Titan' for his ability to defy death on countless occasions, and the equally formidable Dominican Máximo Gómez, but, despite economic disruption and the periodic destruction of the sugar crop, the rebels lacked a dynamic political leader capable of uniting them behind a singular ideological cause.

With the loss of Céspedes in battle in 1874, the war dragged on for another four years, reducing the Cuban economy to tatters and leaving an astronomical 200,000 Cubans and 80,000 Spanish dead. Finally in February 1878 a lackluster pact was signed at El Zanjón between the uncompromising Spanish and the militarily exhausted separatists, a rambling and largely worthless agreement that solved nothing and acceded little to the rebel cause. Maceo, disgusted and disillusioned, made his feelings known in the antidotal 'Protest of Baraguá' but after an abortive attempt to restart the war briefly in 1879, both he and Gómez disappeared into a prolonged exile.

The 1880s brought an end to slavery, a boom in railway construction and Cuba's worst economic crisis for over a century. With the price of sugar falling on the world market, the island's old landowning oligarchy was forced to sell out to a newer and slicker competitor – the United States. By the end of the 19th century US trade with Cuba was larger than US trade with the rest of Latin America combined and Cuba was America's third-largest trading partner after Britain and Germany. The island's sweet-tasting mono-crop economy – a thorn in its side since time immemorial – was translating into a US monopoly and some wealthy Cuban landowners were readvocating the old annexation argument.

Chess is big in Cuba and one of its most famous exponents was Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. When he was killed in combat in 1874 Céspedes was found to have a chess set among the personal possessions he was carrying.

Spanish-Cuban-American War

Cometh the hour, cometh the man: José Martí, poet, patriot, visionary and intellectual had grown rapidly into a patriotic figure of Bolívarian proportions in the years following his ignominious exile in 1870, not just in Cuba, but in the whole of Latin America. After his arrest at the age of 16 during the First War of Independence for a minor indiscretion, Martí had spent 20 years formulating his revolutionary ideas abroad in places as diverse as Guatemala, Mexico and the US. Although impressed by American business savvy and industriousness, he was equally repelled by the country's all-consuming materialism, and was determined to present a workable Cuban alternative.

Dedicating himself passionately to the cause of the resistance, Martí wrote, spoke, petitioned and organized tirelessly for independence for well over a decade and by 1892 had enough momentum to coax Maceo and Gómez out of exile under the umbrella of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC). At last, Cuba had found its Bolívar.

Predicting that the time was right for another revolution, Martí and his compatriots set sail for Cuba in April 1895 landing near Baracoa two months after PRC-sponsored insurrections had tied down Spanish forces in Habana. Raising an army of 40,000 men the rebels promptly regrouped and headed west engaging the Spanish for the first time on May 19 in a place called Dos Ríos. It was on this bullet-strafed and strangely anonymous battlefield that Martí, conspicuous on his white horse and dressed in his trademark black dinner suit, was shot and killed as he charged suicidally toward the Spanish lines. Had he lived he would certainly have become Cuba's first president; instead, he became a hero and a martyr whose life and legacy would inspire generations of Cubans in the years to come.

A 1976 book entitled *How the Battleship Maine was Destroyed* concluded that the explosion of the *Maine* in Habana Harbor in 1898 was caused by the spontaneous combustion of coal in the ship's bunker.

Conscious of mistakes made during the First War of Independence, Gómez and Maceo stormed west in a scorched earth policy that left everything from the Oriente to Matanzas up in flames. Early victories quickly led to a sustained offensive and by January 1896 Maceo had broken through to Pinar del Río, while Gómez was tying down Spanish forces

JOSÉ MARTÍ

For millions of Cubans worldwide José Martí is a heroic and emblematic figure; a potent unifying symbol in a nation fractiously divided by economy, ideology and 90 miles of shark-infested ocean. In Florida they have named a TV station after him. In Habana, Castro touts his name with an almost religious reverence. Throughout Cuba there is barely a town or village that hasn't got at least one street, square or statue named proudly in his honor. The fact that Martí, who died prematurely at the age of 42 leading a suicidal cavalry charge headlong toward the Spanish lines, spent less that one-third of his life residing in his beloved motherland is largely academic.

Born in Habana in 1853 to Spanish parents, Martí grew up fast, publishing his first newspaper *La Patria Libre* at the age of 16. But his provocative writings, flushed with the fervent prose and lyrical poetry that would one day make him famous, soon landed him in trouble. Tried and convicted in 1870 for penning a letter denouncing a friend who had attended a pro-Spanish rally during the First War of Independence, he was charged with treason and sentenced to six months of hard labor in a Habana stone quarry. Later that year, thanks to the influence of his father, the still-teenage Martí was moved to the Isla de Pinos and in 1871 he was exiled to Spain.

Slightly built with a well-waxed Dali-esque moustache and trademark black business suit, Martí cut a rather unlikely hero-to-be in his formative years. Graduating with a degree in law from Saragossa University in 1874 he relocated to Mexico City where he tentatively began a career in journalism.

For the next seven years Martí was constantly on the move, living successively in Guatemala, Spain, France, Venezuela and Cuba, from where he was exiled for a second time in 1879 for his conspiratorial activities and anticolonial statements.

Gravitating toward the US, the wandering writer based himself in the Big Apple for 14 years with his wife and son, devoting his time to poetry, prose, politics and journalism. He was the New York correspondent for two Latin American newspapers, *La Nación* in Buenos Aires and *La Opinión Nacional* in Caracas, and was later appointed New York consul for the countries of Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina.

Always adamant to avoid cultural assimilation in the American melting pot, Martí nurtured a deep-rooted mistrust for the US system of government borne out of insider experience and a canny sense of political calculation. He argued vociferously for Cuban independence, and claimed consistently that the Americans were no better than the Spanish in their neocolonial ambitions. 'I have lived inside the monster and know its entrails,' he once stated portentously.

Never one to rest on his rhetoric, Martí left for Florida in 1892 to set up the Cuban Revolutionary Party, the grassroots political movement that spearheaded the 1895–98 War of Independence against the Spanish.

Landing in Cuba in April 1895 at the remote beach of La Playita in Guantánamo Province, Martí's personal war effort lasted precisely 38 days. Destined to be more of a theorist than a man of action, he was cut down at a skirmish at Dos Ríos on May 19, one of the war's first casualties and an instantly recognizable martyr.

Though never ostensibly a socialist during his lifetime, Martí propounded the values of liberty, equality and democracy as central to his fledgling manifesto for an independent Cuba. Unflinching in his hatred of racism and imperialism, he believed in the power of reason, extending friendship to those Spaniards who supported Cuban independence, but war against those who didn't.

The spirit of José Martí is still very much alive in Cuba today. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the country – with its distinct culture and enviable health and education systems – functioning without him. Artistically speaking the scope of Martí the writer was, and still is, mind-boggling. From his eloquent political theorizing, to his populist *Verso Sencillos* and his best-selling children's magazine *La Edad de Oro* he was a cultural icon without equal in Latin America. It is with little wonder that Cubans today refer to him quite simply as 'El Maestro.'

near Habana. The Spaniards responded with an equally ruthless general named Valeriano Weyler, who built countrywide north–south fortifications to restrict the rebels' movements. Aiming to break the under ground resistance, *guajiros* (country people) were forced into camps in a process called *reconcentración*, and anyone supporting the rebellion became liable for execution. The brutal tactics started to show results and on December 7, 1896 the *Mambíses* (19th-century rebels fighting Spain) suffered a major military blow to their confidence when Antonio Maceo was killed south of Habana trying to break out to the east.

By this time Cuba was a mess: thousands were dead, the country was in flames and William Randolph Hearst and the tub-thumping US tabloid press were leading a hysterical war campaign characterized by sensationalized, often inaccurate reports about Spanish atrocities.

Preparing perhaps for the worst, the US battleship *Maine* was sent to Habana in January 1898, on the pretext of 'protecting US citizens.' Fatefully its eponymous task never saw fruition. On February 15, 1898 the *Maine* exploded out of the blue in Habana Harbor, killing 266 US sailors. The Spanish claimed it was an accident, the Americans blamed the Spanish, and some Cubans accused the US, saying it provided a convenient pretext for intervention. The real cause may remain one of history's great mysteries, as the hulk of the ship was scuttled in deep waters in 1911.

After the *Maine* debacle, the US scrambled to take control. They offered Spain US$300 million for Cuba and when this deal was rejected, demanded a full withdrawal. The long-awaited US-Spanish showdown that had been simmering imperceptibly beneath the surface for decades had finally ended in war.

The only important land battle of the conflict was on July 1, when the US Army attacked Spanish positions on San Juan Hill (p403) just east of Santiago de Cuba. Despite vastly inferior numbers and limited, antiquated weaponry, the under-siege Spanish held out bravely for over 24 hours before future US president Theodore Roosevelt broke the deadlock by leading a celebrated cavalry charge of the 'Rough Riders' up San Juan Hill. It was the beginning of the end, as far the Spaniards were concerned and an unconditional surrender was offered to the Americans on July 17, 1898.

On December 12, 1898 a peace treaty ending the Spanish-Cuban-American War was signed in Paris by the Spanish and the Americans. Despite three years of blood, sweat and sacrifice, no Cuban representatives were invited. After a century of trying to buy Cuba from the Spanish, the US – wary of raised voices among shortchanged Cuban nationalists – decided to appease the situation temporarily by offering the island a form of quasi-independence that would dampen internal discontent while keeping any future Cuban governments on a tight leash. In November

1850
The Cuban flag is raised for the first time, by Narciso López in Cárdenas

1868
Céspedes launches an uprising and proclaims the *Grito de Yara*, a cry for liberty, starting the war for independence.

1886
Slavery officially abolished

1898–1902
US military government controls Cuba

1900, US Governor of Cuba, General Leonard Wood, convened a meeting of elected Cuban delegates who drew up a constitution similar to that of the US. The then-Connecticut Senator Orville Platt attached a rider to the US Army Appropriations Bill of 1901 giving the US the right to intervene militarily in Cuba whenever they saw fit. This was approved by President McKinley, and the Cubans were given the choice of accepting what became known as the Platt Amendment, or remaining under a US military occupation indefinitely. The US also used its significant leverage to secure a naval base in Guantánamo Bay in order to protect its strategic interests in the Panama Canal region.

BETWEEN REPUBLIC & REVOLUTION

Trotsky assassin, Ramón Mercader was welcomed to Cuba by Fidel Castro on his release from a Mexican prison in 1960. Splitting his time between the Soviet Union and the Caribbean country he died in Habana in 1978.

On May 20, 1902 Cuba became an independent republic. Hopelessly unprepared for the system of US-style democracy that its northern neighbors optimistically had in mind, the country quickly descended into five decades of on-off chaos headed up by a succession of weak, corrupt governments that called upon US military aid anytime there was the merest sniff of trouble. Intervening three times militarily in the ensuing years (see the boxed text, opposite) the US walked a narrow tightrope between benevolent ally and exasperated foreign meddler. There were, however, some coordinated successes, most notably the eradication of yellow fever using the hypotheses of Cuban doctor Carlos Finlay, and the transformation of the ravaged Cuban economy from postwar wreck into nascent sugar giant.

The postwar economic growth was nothing short of astounding. By the 1920s US companies owned two-thirds of Cuba's farmland and most of its mineral resources. The sugar industry was booming and, with the US gripped by prohibition from 1919 to 1933, the Mafia moved into Habana and gangsters such as Al Capone began to set up a lucrative tourist sector based on drinking, gambling and prostitution. When commodity prices collapsed following the Great Depression, Cuba, like most other Western countries, was plunged into chaos and president-turned-dictator Gerardo Machado y Morales (1925–33) went on a terror campaign to root out detractors. Hoist by his own petard, Machado was toppled during a spontaneous general strike in August 1933 that left a seemingly innocuous army sergeant named Fulgencio Batista (who took no part in Machado's overthrow) to step into the power vacuum.

Batista was a wily and shrewd negotiator who presided over Cuba's best and worst attempts to establish an embryonic democracy in the '40s and '50s. From 1934 onwards he served as the army's chief of staff and in 1940 in a relatively free and fair election he was duly elected president. Given an official mandate, Batista began to enact a wide variety of social reforms and set about drafting Cuba's most liberal and democratic constitution to date. But neither the liberal honeymoon nor Batista's good humor were to last. Stepping down in 1944 the former army sergeant handed over power to the politically inept President Ramón Grau San Martín, and corruption and inefficiency soon reigned like never before.

Aware of his underlying popularity and sensing an easy opportunity to line his pockets with one last big paycheck, Batista cut a deal with the American Mafia in Daytona Beach, Florida, and positioned himself for a

A HISTORY OF US INTERVENTION

In 1823 US Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, mastermind of the audacious Monroe Doctrine – an idea which boldly asserted that the whole of the Western hemisphere fell under US influence – declared that Cuba, like a ripe apple, should gravitate naturally toward the US if cut off from Spain. For the Americans, the proclamation seemed to set some kind of unofficial precedent. Over the ensuing 175 years, US involvement in Cuba has gone from overt to covert to underhand.

- Throughout the 19th century four US presidents – namely, Jefferson, Polk, Pierce and Buchanan – tried unsuccessfully to buy Cuba from Spain.
- After independence in 1902 the US intervened militarily on the island on three separate occasions; in 1906 to restore order after an armed rebellion, in 1912 after a short-lived black uprising and again in 1917 after a general strike.
- A summit of the American Mafia convened in Habana's Hotel Nacional in 1946 turned Cuba into a playground for the rich and famous and Habana into a disreputable city of sin. The Mafia influence ultimately led to the return of US-backed General Batista in an illegal coup in March 1952.
- In April 1961 a CIA-backed invasion of the Bay of Pigs was stamped out by the Cuban army inside 72 hours.
- Operation Mongoose, also known as the Cuban Project, was a covert plan initiated by the Kennedy administration in 1961 to 'help Cuba overthrow the communist regime' and, by definition, covertly aid and abet the elimination of its leader Fidel Castro. In the hope of spreading discontent among the Cuban population the project hatched nearly 30 plots between 1961 and 1965. Abortive schemes included the destruction of the sugar crop, the mining of Cuban harbors, and the sprinkling of Castro's shoes with thallium salts: a tactic that was supposed to make his hair and beard fall out, thus making him look ridiculous.
- Successive postrevolutionary laws such as the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act and the 1996 Helms-Burton law have increasingly tightened the screws on a 45-year US trade embargo.

comeback. On March 10, 1952, three months before scheduled elections that he looked like losing, Batista staged a second military coup. Wildly condemned by opposition politicians inside Cuba but foolishly recognized by the US government two weeks later, Batista quickly let it be known that his second incarnation wasn't going to be quite as enlightened as his first.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

After Batista's second coup, a revolutionary circle formed in Habana around the charismatic figure of Fidel Castro, a qualified lawyer and gifted orator who had been due to stand in the cancelled 1952 elections. Supported by his younger brother Raúl and aided intellectually by his trusty lieutenant Abel Santamaría (later tortured to death by Batista's thugs), Castro saw no alternative to the use of force in ridding Cuba of its detestable dictator. Low on numbers but adamant to make a political statement, Castro led 119 rebels in an attack on the strategically important Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953 (see p402). The audacious and poorly planned assault failed dramatically when the rebel's driver (who was from Habana) took the wrong turning in Santiago's badly signposted streets and the alarm was raised.

1903 US takes Guantánamo naval base

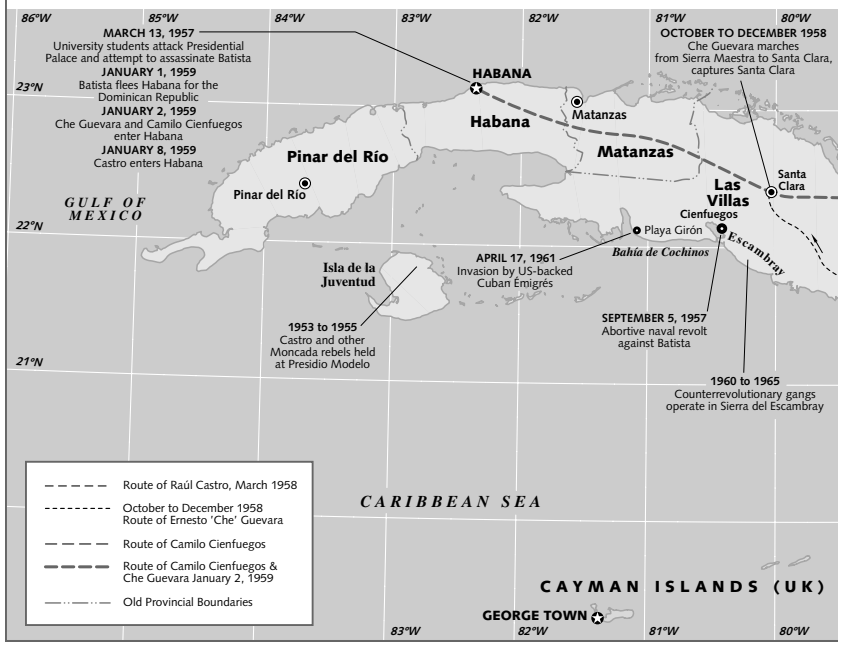
1925 Cuban Communist Party founded by Julio Antonio Mella

1934 Platt Amendment abrogated, but Guantánamo US naval base lease extended for 99 years

1952 Batista military coup

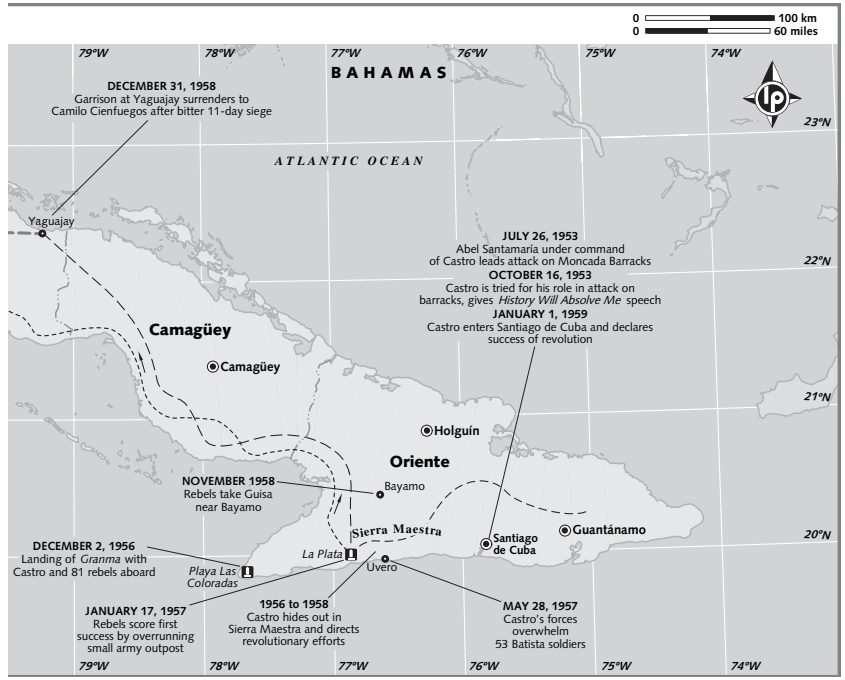
Fooled, flailing and hopelessly outnumbered, 64 of the Moncada conspirators were rounded up by Batista's army and brutally tortured and executed. Castro and a handful of others managed to escape into the nearby mountains, where they were found a few days later by a sympathetic army lieutenant named Sarría, who had been given instructions to kill them. 'Don't shoot, you can't kill ideas!' Sarría is alleged to have shouted on finding Castro and his exhausted colleagues. By taking him to jail instead of doing away with him, Sarría – a foresighted and highly principled man – ruined his military career, but saved Fidel's life. (One of Fidel's first acts after the revolution triumphed was to release Sarría from the prison where Batista had incarcerated him and give him a commission in the revolutionary army.) Castro's capture soon became national news, and he was put on trial in the full glare of the media spotlight. A lawyer by profession, the loquacious Fidel defended himself in court writing an eloquent and masterfully executed speech that he later transcribed into a comprehensive political manifesto entitled *History Will Absolve Me*. Basking in his newfound legitimacy and backed by a growing sense of restlessness with the old regime in the country at large, Castro was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment on Isla de Pinos (a former name for Isla de la Juventud). Cuba was well on the way to gaining a new national hero.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION



In February 1955, Batista won the presidency in what were widely considered to be fraudulent elections and, in an attempt to curry favor with growing internal opposition, agreed to an amnesty for all political prisoners, including Castro. Realizing that Batista's real intention was to assassinate him once out of jail, Castro fled to Mexico leaving Baptist schoolteacher Frank País in charge of a fledgling underground resistance campaign the vengeful Moncada veterans had christened the 26th of July Movement (M-26-7).

Cocooned in Mexico, Fidel and his compatriots plotted and planned afresh, drawing in key new figures such as Camilo Cienfuegos and the Argentine doctor Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, both of whom added strength and panache to the nascent army of disaffected rebel soldiers. On the run from the Mexican police and adamant to arrive in Cuba in time for an uprising Frank País had planned for late November 1956 in Santiago de Cuba, Castro and 81 companions set sail for the island on November 25 in an old and overcrowded leisure yacht named *Granma*. After seven dire days at sea they arrived at Playa Las Coloradas near Niquero in Oriente (p386) on December 2 two days late, and after a catastrophic landing – 'it wasn't a disembarkation; it was a shipwreck' a wry Guevara later commented – they were spotted and routed by Batista's soldiers in a sugarcane field at Alegría de Pío three days later.



1953
Castro leads band of rebels in an attack on Moncada army barracks

1956
Ernesto 'Che' Guevara joins Fidel and his compatriots in Mexico

1959
Castro gives a triumphal speech at the successful conclusion of the Revolution

1960
Cuba nationalizes US assets

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Of the 82 rebels soldiers who had left Mexico, only 12 managed to escape. Splitting into three tiny groups the survivors wandered around hopelessly for days half-starved, wounded and assuming that the rest of their compatriots had been killed in the initial skirmish. 'At one point I was Commander in Chief of myself and two other people,' commented Fidel sagely years later. However, with the help of the local peasantry, the dozen or so hapless soldiers finally managed to reassemble two weeks later in Cinco Palmas, a clearing in the shadows of the Sierra Maestra Mountains where a half-delirious Fidel gave a rousing and premature victory speech. 'We will win this war,' he proclaimed confidently, 'We are just beginning the fight!'

Che Guevara – whose father's family name was Guevara Lynch – can trace his Celtic roots back to a Patrick Lynch, born in Galway in Ireland in 1715, who emigrated to Buenos Aires via Bilbao in 1749.

The comeback began on January 17, 1957, when the guerrillas scored an important victory by sacking a small army outpost on the south coast called La Plata (p426). This was followed in February by a devastating propaganda coup when Fidel persuaded *New York Times* journalist Herbert Matthews to come up into the Sierra Maestra to interview him. The resulting article made Castro internationally famous and gained him much sympathy among liberal Americans. Suffice to say, by this point, he wasn't the only anti-Batista agitator. On March 13, 1957 university students led by José Antonio Echeverría attacked the Presidential Palace in Habana (now the Museo de la Revolución; see p102) in an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Batista. Thirty-two of the 35 attackers were shot dead as they fled and reprisals were meted out on the streets of Habana with a new vengeance. Cuba was rapidly disintegrating into a police state run by military trained thugs.

Of the 12 or so men that survived the disastrous *Granma* landing in December 1956, only four now remain. They are Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, Juan Almeida and Ramiro Valdés.

Elsewhere passions were running equally high and in September 1957 naval officers in the normally tranquil city of Cienfuegos staged an armed revolt and set about distributing weapons among the disaffected populace. After some bitter door-to-door fighting, the insurrection was brutally crushed and the ringleaders rounded up and killed, but for the revolutionaries the point had been made. Batista's days were numbered.

Back in the Sierra Maestra, Fidel's rebels overwhelmed 53 Batista soldiers at an army post in El Uvero in May and captured more badly needed supplies. The movement seemed to be gaining momentum and despite losing respected underground leader Frank País to a government assassination squad in Santiago de Cuba in July, support and sympathy around the country was starting to mushroom. By the beginning of 1958 Castro had established a fixed headquarters at La Plata, in a cloud forest high up in the Sierra Maestra, and was broadcasting propaganda messages from Radio Rebelde (710AM and 96.7FM) all across Cuba. The tide was starting to turn.

Sensing his popularity waning, Batista sent an army of 10,000 men into the Sierra Maestra in May 1958 on a mission known as Plan FF (*Fin de Fidel* or End of Fidel). The intention was to liquidate Castro and his merry band of loyal guerrillas who had now burgeoned into a solid fighting force of 300 men. Outnumbered 30 to one, and fighting desperately for their lives, the offensive became something of a turning point as the rebels – with the help of the local *campesinos* – gradually halted the onslaught of Batista's young and ill-disciplined conscript army. With the Americans increasingly embarrassed by the no-holds-barred terror tactics of their onetime Cuban ally, Castro sensed an opportunity to turn defensive into offensive and signed the groundbreaking Caracas Pact with eight leading opposition groups calling on the US to stop all aid to Batista. Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos were promptly dispatched off to the Escambray Mountains to open up new fronts in the west and by December, with Cienfuegos holding down troops in Yaguajay (the garrison finally surrendered after an 11-day siege) and Guevara closing in on Santa Clara, the end was in sight. It was left to Che Guevara to seal the final victory, employing classic guerrilla tactics to derail an armored train in Santa Clara and split the country's battered communications system in two. By New Year's Eve 1958, the game was up: a sense of jubilation filled the country, and Che and Camilo were on their way to Habana unopposed.

On January 2, 1959, the Cuban government announced that 50% to 60% of all casino profits would be directed to welfare programs.

In the small hours Batista fled by private plane to the Dominican Republic, taking US$40 million in embezzled government funds with him. Materializing in Santiago de Cuba on January 1 meanwhile, Fidel made a rousing victory speech from the town hall in Parque Céspedes before jumping into a jeep and traveling across the breadth of the country to Habana in a Caesar-like cavalcade. The triumph of the revolution was complete. Or was it?

CONSOLIDATING POWER

On January 5, 1959, the Cuban presidency was assumed by Manuel Urrutia, a judge who had defended the M-26-7 prisoners during the 1953 Moncada trials, though the leadership and real power remained unquestionably with Fidel. Riding on the crest of a popular wave the self-styled *Líder Máximo* began to mete out revolutionary justice with an iron fist and within a matter of weeks hundreds of Batista's supporters and military henchmen had been rounded up and executed inside the walls of La Cabaña fort. Already suspicious of Castro's supposed communist leanings, the US viewed these openly antagonistic developments with a growing sense of alarm and when Fidel visited Richard Nixon in the White House on a state visit in April 1959 the vicepresident gave him a decidedly cool and terse reception.

Among over a thousand laws and acts passed by revolutionary government in its first year were rent and electricity cost reductions, the abolition of racial discrimination and the much-lauded First Agrarian Reform Act. This landmark piece of legislation nationalized all rural estates over 400 hectares (without compensation), and infuriated Cuba's largest landholders, the bulk of whom were American. Establishing the embryonic Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (Agrarian Reform Institute; INRA) as an umbrella organization, the government slowly began to piece together the rural apparatus that would later prove decisive in promoting its ambitious literacy and community doctor programs.

Meanwhile back on the political scene, entities with vested interests in Cuba were growing increasingly bellicose. Perturbed by Castro's intransigent individual style and increasingly alarmed by his gradual and none-too-subtle shift to the left, dissidents started voting with their feet. Between 1959 and 1962 approximately 250,000 judges, lawyers, managers

1961 Bay of Pigs invasion; US declares a full trade embargo

1962 Cuban missile crisis

1967 Ernesto 'Che' Guevara executed in Bolivia

1972 Cuba joins Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) trading bloc

and technicians left Cuba, primarily for the United States and throughout the top professions Cuba began to experience an economically debilitating brain drain. Fidel, meanwhile, hit back at the counter-revolutionaries with stringent press restrictions and the threat of arrest and incarceration for anyone caught being outwardly critical of the new regime.

Crisis begot crisis, and in June 1960 Texaco, Standard Oil and Shell refineries in Cuba buckled under US pressure and refused to refine Soviet petroleum. Sensing an opportunity to score diplomatic points over his embittered American rivals, Castro dutifully nationalized the oil companies. President Eisenhower was left with little choice: he cut 700,000 tons from the Cuban sugar quota in an attempt to get even. Rather worryingly for Cold War relations, the measure played right into the hands of the Soviet Union. Already buttered up by a 1959 visit from Che Guevara, the USSR stepped out of the shadows the following day and promised to buy the Cuban sugar at the same preferential rates. The tit-for-tat war that would come to characterize Cuban-Soviet-US relations for the next 30 years had well and truly begun.

La Rosa Blanca (the White Rose), the first anti-Castro movement to take hold in the US, was formed in January 1959 by Dr Rafael Díaz-Balart, Fidel's former brother-in-law.

The diplomatic crisis heated up again in August when Cuba nationalized US-owned telephone and electricity companies and 36 sugar mills, including US$800 million in US assets. Outraged, the American government forced through an Organization of American States (OAS) resolution condemning 'extra-continental' (Soviet) intervention in the Western hemisphere while Cuba responded by establishing diplomatic relations with communist China and edging ever closer to its new Soviet ally, via a hastily signed arms deal.

By October 1960, 382 major Cuban-owned firms, the majority of its banks and the whole rental housing market had been nationalized and both the US and Castro were starting to prepare for the military showdown that by this point seemed inevitable. Turning the screw ever tighter, the US imposed a partial trade embargo on the island as Che Guevara (now Minister of Industry) nationalized all remaining US businesses. In the space of just three short years Fidel had gone from the darling of the American liberals to US public enemy number one. The stage was set.

COLD WAR DEEP FREEZE

The brick finally hit the window in early 1961 when Castro ordered US embassy reductions in Habana. Barely able to conceal their fury, the Americans broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba, banned US citizens from traveling to the island and abolished the remaining Cuban sugar quota. At the same time the government, in collusion with the CIA, began to initiate a covert program of action against the Castro regime that included invasion plans, assassination plots and blatant acts of sabotage. Much of this aid was filtered through to counter-revolutionary gangs who – borrowing a tactic from Fidel – had set up in the Escambray Mountains in an attempt to initiate a guerrilla war against the new government. At the center of subterfuge lay the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion (see boxed text, p255), a poorly conceived military plot that honed 1400 disaffected Cuban exiles into a workable fighting force in the jungles of Guatemala. Deemed sufficiently armed and ready to fight, the émigrés sailed on April 14, 1961 with a US navy escort from Puerto Cabeza in Nicaragua, to the southern coast of Cuba. But military glory wasn't forthcoming. Landing at Playa Girón and Playa Larga three days later, the US-backed expeditionary forces took a conclusive drubbing, in part because President Kennedy canceled US air cover during the landings, a decision which has been the subject of much revisionist analysis (and possibly cost him his life?).

Rocked and embarrassed by what had been a grave and politically costly military defeat, the Americans declared a full trade embargo on Cuba in June 1961, and in January 1962 the US used diplomatic pressure to expel the island from the OAS (Organization of American States). To the dismay of the Americans, their closest neighbors, Mexico and Canada, refused to bow to US pressure to sever diplomatic relations with Cuba completely, thus throwing the country a valuable lifeline which – in the case of Canada – still exists to this day. Spinning inexorably into the Soviet sphere of influence, Castro began to cement closer relations with Khrushchev and upped the ante even further in April 1962 when, exploiting American weakness after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, he agreed to effect the installation of Soviet-made medium-range missiles on the island.

Castro has admirers everywhere. In 2005 even ex-US secretary of state Colin Powell conceded in congressional testimony that 'he's done some good things for his people.'

The Americans were furious and, anxious not to lose any more face on the international scene, the Kennedy administration decided to act quickly and decisively. On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy ordered the US Navy to detain Cuba-bound Soviet ships and search for missiles, provoking the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the world closer to the nuclear brink than it has ever been before or since. Six days later, only after receiving a secret assurance from Kennedy that Cuba would not be invaded, Khrushchev ordered the missiles dismantled. Castro, who was not consulted nor informed of the decision until it was a done deal, was livid and reputedly smashed a mirror in his anger. More bad luck was on the way.

BUILDING SOCIALISM WORLDWIDE

The learning curve was steep in the revolution's first decade. The economy continued to languish in the doldrums despite massive injections of Soviet aid and production was marked by all of the normal inconsistencies, shortages and quality issues that characterize uncompetitive socialist markets. As National Bank president and later Minister of Industry, Che Guevara advocated centralization and moral, rather than material, incentives for workers. But despite his own tireless efforts to lead by example and sponsor voluntary work weekends, all attempts to create the 'New Man,' ultimately proved to be unsustainable.

Similarly the effort to produce a 10-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970 was equally misguided and almost led to economic catastrophe, as the country ditched everything in pursuit of one all-encompassing obsession.

Adamant to learn from its mistakes, the Cuban government elected to diversify and mechanize after 1970, ushering in a decade of steadier growth and relative economic prosperity. As power was de-centralized and a small market economy permitted to flourish, people's livelihoods gradually began to improve and, for the first time in decades, Cubans started to live more comfortably, due in no small part to burgeoning

1976 Terrorist group bombs Cuban jet, killing all 73 aboard

1977 US establishes Interests Section in Habana; Cuba opens one in Washington DC

1991 Soviet Union collapses; future of Cuba enters uncertain waters

1993 US dollar legalized

trade with the Soviet bloc, which increased from 65% of the total in the early 1970s to 87% in 1988.

With the home front starting to reawaken from a deep slumber, Castro turned his attention towards the international stage and his vision for Cuba as leader of a Third World coalition in global affairs. The idea was nothing new. Covertly, Cuba had been sponsoring guerrilla activity in South America and Africa since the early 1960s, and in 1965 Che Guevara had spent nine largely fruitless months in the Republic of Congo trying to ignite a popular uprising among a fractious band of antigovernment rebels. Quickly abandoning his plans in frustration, Guevara resurfaced a year later in Bolivia where he launched another equally fruitless campaign aimed at inspiring the Bolivian peasantry to rise up against their oppressive militaristic government. Unfortunately the Cuban model didn't translate well to the Bolivian reality and Bolivian troops, with heavy US support, captured Guevara on October 8, 1967. Shot the next day by a nervous alcohol-plied executioner he went down in history much as Martí had done before him – a martyr.

Longevity runs in the family. All of Fidel Castro's six siblings are still alive, from Angela, three years his senior, to Agostina, 11 years his junior.

In an interesting footnote to the story, Guevara's remains, which lay in an unmarked grave beneath a Bolivian airfield for nearly 30 years, were rediscovered in 1997 and returned to Cuba amid much ceremony. They now rest in a mausoleum adjacent to the Plaza de la Revolución in Che's adopted Cuban city of Santa Clara (p274).

Cuba's involvement in the Angolan war was a heavy and costly adven ture. Initially invited to send troops to Luanda by Angolan leader Agostinho Neto in November 1975, the Cubans quickly became bogged down in a long and complex bush war that pitted tribe against tribe and Marxist MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) government against South Africa's reactionary apartheid regime. Famous for their tenacity in battle and oft-lauded for their bravery under fire, the Cubans slugged it out for over 10 years alongside poorly trained MPLA forces and heavy-duty Soviet weaponry. But, despite a conclusive military defeat over the apartheid regime in 1988, the price of the Angolan escapade was inexorably high – for many, too high. Barely mentioned in Cuban history books, the Angolan war conscripted over 300,000 Cubans between 1975 and 1991 and left 14,000 of them dead. And the end result was negligible. The war in Angola dragged on until 2002 killing an estimated 1.5 million Angolans and leaving the country a mess.

In 1999 American President Bill Clinton granted GlaxoSmithKline permission to develop a Cuban Meningitis B vaccine.

In 1976 a third Cuban constitution was drawn up and approved by referendum; Fidel Castro replaced Osvaldo Dorticós as president.

CRISIS AS THE WALL FALLS

After almost 25 years of a top-down Soviet-style economy, it was obvious that quality was suffering and ambitious production quotas were becoming increasingly unrealistic. In 1986 Castro initiated the 'rectification of errors' campaign, a process that aimed to reduce malfunctioning bureaucracy and allow more local-level decision making to wrest control. Just as the process was reaping some rewards the Eastern bloc collapsed in the dramatic events that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in Europe. As trade and credits amounting to US$5 billion vanished almost overnight from the Cuban balance sheet, Castro – adamant to avoid the fate of East German leader Erich Honecker and Romanian president Ceausescu – declared a five-year *período especial* (special period; Cuba's new economic reality post 1991) austerity program that sent living standards plummeting and instituted a system of rationing that would make the sacrifices of wartime Europe almost pale in comparison. Any Cuban over the age of 25 can furnish you with painful horror stories from this era, including tales of fried grapefruit skins, microjet rice and pigs being reared in the bathroom.

Sniffing the blood of a dying communist animal, the US tightened the noose in 1992 with the harsh Torricelli Act, which forbade foreign subsidiaries of US companies from trading with Cuba and prohibited ships

HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA

Called to task by the UN and regularly berated by the powers that be in Washington, Cuba's human rights record has always been a political hot potato.

The party got off to a bad start in January 1959 when the revolutionary government – under the auspices of Che Guevara – rounded up Batista's top henchmen and summarily executed them inside Habana's La Cabaña fort with barely a lawyer in sight. Within a matter of months the Cuban press had been silenced, and worried onlookers inside the Eisenhower administration were vociferously crying 'foul.'

After lengthy spats of back-and-forth recrimination in the years since, little appears to have changed. To Western observers the continued denial of free speech and basic civil liberties in socialist Cuba is a measure that reeks of repression. To make matters worse, Amnesty International is currently calling on the Cuban authorities to release 100 or more 'prisoners of conscience' who dared to speak out against the government before two draconian crackdowns in March 2003 and July 2005 (the Cubans claim the dissidents were being funded by the US Special Interests Office). It has also – interestingly – called for an end to the US trade embargo which it claims has long had a detrimental effect on human rights on the island.

The argument, as ever, is complex. To compare Cuba to the Stalinist Soviet Union, or former US-backed dictatorships such as Rios Montt's Guatemala, is something of a conundrum, even for the regime's worst critics. There are no middle-of-the-night 'disappearances' in Cuba and no institutionalized torture of the kind perpetuated by former Mafia puppet President Batista.

Rather, to understand Cuba's attitude to human rights it is important to try to view the issue in a relative context. Firstly socialist ideology tends to emphasize duties over individual liberties and basic needs such as free health, education and housing over the right to own four SUVs. Secondly, after 45 years of sabotage, espionage and badly hatched assassination plots by an aggressive and more powerful US neighbor, Cuba has been forced to cultivate a tight-knit fortress mentality in order to ward off its enemies and keep an easily heckled populace in check.

None of this, of course, can obscure the hard facts: in Cuba, to speak out against the government is a serious and heavily punishable crime that – if it doesn't first land you in jail – will undoubtedly lead to job stagnation, petty harassment and social ostracism. To add insult to injury, in April 2005 Cuba announced that it would not cooperate in any way with a mandate for a UN envoy to investigate human rights abuses on the island. The announcement followed a couple of years after the Cuban government had handed out the death sentence to a group of hijackers who had apprehended a boat and attempted to sail it to Florida.

This issue can be given a sharper focus by looking across the barbed wire into Guantánamo naval base where, with heavy irony and under the watchful eye of a largely powerless international community, the United States has perpetuated a good few human rights abuses of its own.

that had called at Cuban ports from docking at US ports for six months. Ninety percent of the trade banned by this law consisted of food, medicine and medical equipment, which led the American Association for World Health to conclude that the US embargo has caused a significant rise in suffering – even deaths – in Cuba.

In November 2005 the UN Assembly voted 182-4 to urge the United States to end its 44-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. Voting with the US against the resolution were Israel, Palau and the Marshall Islands.

In August 1993, with the country slipping rapidly into an economic coma and Habana on the verge of riot, the US dollar was legalized, allowing Cubans to hold and spend foreign currency and open US dollar bank accounts. Spearheaded by the unlikely figure of Raúl Castro, other liberal reforms followed including limited private enterprise, self-employment, the opening of farmers' markets and the expansion of the almost non-existent tourist sector into a mainstay of the new burgeoning economy.

But the recovery was not without its problems. Class differences reemerged as people with US dollars began to gain access to goods and services not available in pesos, while touts and prostitutes known as *jineteros/as* took up residence in tourist areas where they preyed upon rich foreigners whose designer clothes and comfortable capitalist lifestyles they longed to emulate.

Although some of the worst shortages have been alleviated thanks to the reinvestment of tourist revenue into public services, the *período especial* has left a nasty scar. Much to the popular chagrin, the government also started to go back on some of its earlier liberalization measures in an attempt to reestablish an updated brand of old socialist orthodoxy.

Following the 1994 Balsero crisis (p247) and a handful of further shots in the ongoing diplomatic war that had been plaguing US-Cuban relations for decades, the US pulled the embargo a notch tighter in 1996 by signing the Helms-Burton Bill into law. Widely condemned by the international community, and energetically leapt upon by Castro as a devastating propaganda tool, the bill allows US investors to take legal action in the American courts against foreign companies utilizing their confiscated property in Cuba. It also prevents any US president from lifting the embargo until a transitional government is in place in Habana.

INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Cuba entered the new millennium in the throes of the Elián González drama, a tragic family crisis that was to become an allegory for the all-pervading senselessness of the ongoing Cuban-American immigration showdown.

Failing to learn the lessons of its predecessors (nine of whom had tried and failed to 'get rid of' Castro), the Bush administration came out all guns blazing in November 2000, following the victory-clinching Florida vote recount; a state in which conservative Cuban exiles have always punched way above their weight.

Promising to crack down on Cuba's purported human rights' abuses, George W Bush's rhetoric turned venomous after September 11, when the president began mentioning the Castro regime in the same breath as North Korea and Iraq. Subsequently US policy was rolled back to resemble the worst of the Cold War years with rigid travel restrictions, economically damaging financial constraints and a hawkish no-compromise political rhetoric.

Rather than score much-needed capital out of Bush's belligerence, Castro elected to shoot himself in the foot by proceeding to arrest scores of so-called dissidents who had – allegedly – been sponsored by US Special Interests Office chief James Cason to spread social unrest across the island. Whether or not this was true, the trials and hefty prison sentences meted out to more than 100 of these 'antes' gained little sympathy from horrified human rights groups worldwide, as Castro's heavy-handed crackdown was condemned by everyone from Amnesty International to the Vatican.

In 2005 *Human Rights Watch* condemned the travel restrictions imposed by both Cuba and the US, saying: 'Both countries are sacrificing people's freedom of movement to promote dead-end policies.'

Things turned uglier in April 2003 when three hijackings by Cubans seeking transport to the US presaged a possible migratory crisis (Cuban officials uncovered more than 20 other hijacking plans in the works). Armed with guns, knives and, in one case, grenades, two planes and a ferry were hijacked in a series of separate dramatic events that had news, gossip and speculation flying. One plane made it to the US, but the ferry and second plane didn't. Three of the hijackers apprehended in Cuba were tried, sentenced to death and executed, triggering another avalanche of international criticism from intellectuals, human rights advocates, politicians and religious leaders.

While ostensibly things have improved immeasurably in Cuba since the dark days of the *período especial*, the economic meltdown has left its bloody mark. By dangling the carrot of capitalism in front of the Cuban populace in the form of all-inclusive tourism, limited private enterprise and the legalization of US dollar (1993 to 2004), the psychology of Cuba's 'New Man' has been irrevocably damaged.

But it's not all bad news. On the international scene Cuba has successfully managed to wrest itself free from its once near-fatal addiction to sugar cane and has branched out confidently into other areas. Spearheading a mini-economic revival are a clutch of new industries such as tourism, nickel mining (although the first two have led to an element of environmental damage) and the island's internationally famous medical sector. Indeed, the latter service has played a large part in fostering a strong new economic and political alliance with Cuba's new friends in Venezuela and, in exchange for the Cuban doctors and teachers needed to enact vital social reforms, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez has furnished Cuba with millions of dollars worth of petroleum from his country's abundant oil wells. It doesn't end there. Thanks to a recent medical exchange program known as Misión Milagros (see p449) this cooperation has been extended to a number of other countries throughout the region and evidence of a new left tide in Latin America politics, which may one day challenge the hegemony of the United State in the region, is growing.

Cuba began its Third World medical assistance by sending 56 doctors to Algeria. It now has ongoing medical programs with 58 Third World countries.

But what of the future? For decades Fidel's chosen heir has been his younger brother, head of the armed forces, Raúl, a lifelong communist and fellow survivor of the ill-fated *Granma* expedition and subsequent war in the mountains.

Patient and little more forgiving than his volatile older sibling, the younger Castro – insiders claim – is a cagey and diplomatic negotiator who does not share his brother's pathological hatred of the United States; a factor that could play an important part in reopening dialogue with Cuba's hostile neighbors to the north.

1998
Five Cubans are arrested by US authorities on questionable spy charges; they remain in prison

2002
First US Food & Agribusiness Exhibition held in Habana

2002
Half of Cuba's sugar refineries are closed, signaling the end of an era

2003
George W Bush tightens travel noose for US citizens traveling to Cuba

But, negotiation skills aside, it is unlikely that Raúl, who lacks both the charisma and popular support of the Machiavellian Fidel, could rule alone. What is more likely is some kind of collective government propped up by other key figures such as Vice President Carlos Lage, the economic guru responsible for dragging Cuba's battered economy through the darkest days of the *período especial*.

In 2001 Maine became the first US state to pass a resolution calling for a complete end to the trade and travel ban against Cuba.

Concern over how Cuban exiles living in Florida will react to Castro's death is well-founded. Bitterness over the Cuban government's requisition of millions of dollars worth of private property in the early 1960s is still palpable in Miami and the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which gives American citizens the right to sue for confiscated property through the US courts, has exacerbated the problem.

For a peaceful transition of power, restraint by governments on both sides is key, coupled with the understanding that many of Cuba's postrevolutionary advances – healthcare and education to name but two – are certainly worth preserving. As to whether this is possible: only time will tell.

2004
US dollar taken out of circulation

2006
Castro celebrates his 80th birthday

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Funny, gracious, generous, tactile and slow to anger, the Cuban people are the Irish of the Americas; a small nation with a big personality, and plenty of rum-fueled backs-to-the-wall boisterousness to go with it. Take the time to get to know them on their own turf and you're halfway to understanding what this most confounding and contradictory of Caribbean countries is all about.

Survivors by nature and necessity, Cubans have long displayed an almost inexhaustible ability to bend the rules and 'work things out' when it matters. In a country where everything is illegal, anything becomes possible and from the backstreets of Baracoa to the hedonistic heights of Habana nobody's shy about 'giving it a go.'

The two most over-used verbs in the national phrasebook are *conseguir* (to get, manage) and *resolver* (to resolve, work out) and Cubans are experts at doing both. Their intuitive ability to bend the rules and make something out of nothing is borne out of economic necessity. In a small nation bucking modern sociopolitical realities, where monthly salaries top out at around the equivalent of US$20, survival can often mean getting innovative as a means of supplementing personal income. Cruise the crumbling streets of Habana Centro and you'll see people *conseguir*-ing and *resolver*-ing wherever you go. There's the barber giving straight razor shaves on his patio, or the lady selling fresh eggs door to door. Other schemes may be ill-gotten or garnered through trickery, like the *compañera* (female revolutionary) who siphons cooking oil from her day job to sell on the side. Old Cuba hands know one of the most popular ways to make extra cash is working with (or over) tourists.

In Cuba, hard currency (ie Convertible pesos) rules, primarily because it is the only way of procuring the modest luxuries that make living in this austere socialist republic vaguely bearable. Paradoxically, the post-1993 double economy has reinvigorated the class system the revolution worked so hard to neutralize and it's no longer rare to see Cubans with access to Convertibles touting designer clothing while others hassle tourists mercilessly for spare change. This stark re-emergence of 'haves' and 'have nots' is among the most ticklish issues facing Cuba today.

Other social traits absorbed since the revolution are more altruistic and less divisive. In Cuba sharing is second nature and helping out your

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

- If you're staying in a resort, venture outside for a day in order to gain an insight into how real Cubans live, work and play.
- You're in a rationing state. Make allowances for shortages, slow service, unavailability of goods and higher levels of state bureaucracy.
- While Cuban law has many grey areas, try to avoid offers that are blatantly illegal (an unauthorized paladar, more than two people per room in a casa particular). Such actions are more likely to get your Cuban hosts into trouble than yourself.
- Go open-minded and leave any preconceptions you may have about Castro, Che and communism at home. Try to see through the haranguing of the street hustlers in order to find the proud, open, welcoming and fascinatingly paradoxical country that lies underneath.

compañero with a lift, a square meal or a few Convertibles when they're in trouble is considered a national duty. Check the way that strangers interact in queues or at transport intersections and log how your casa particular owner always refers you onto someone else, often on the other side of the country.

In such an egalitarian system the notion of fairness is often sacred and although the image of Che's 'New Man' might be looking a little worn around the edges these days, the social cohesion that characterized the lean years of the *período especial* (special period; Cuba's economic reality post 1991) still remains loosely intact. One of the most common arguments you'll see in a Cuban street is over queue-jumping – a fracas that won't just involve the one or two people directly involved, but half the town.

Life in Cuba is open and interactive. Come 10pm the whole population will be sitting outside on their rocking chairs shooting the breeze over dominos, cigars, cheap rum or the omnipresent TV sets. Home life is important here and often three generations of the same family can be found living together under one roof. Such binding ties make the complex question of the embargo all the more painful. One of the saddest effects of the US-Cuban deep freeze is the broken families. Precipitated by prejudicial immigration policies on Washington's part and downright intransigence on Fidel's, many Cubans have left home in search of brighter horizons and almost everyone has a long-lost sister, cousin, twin or aunt making it good (or not so good) overseas.

For the best up-to-date Cuban cultural news in English click onto www.cubanow.net for an informative and easy-to-read exposé on everything and everyone connected with Cuban culture from Frank Sinatra to Graham Greene.

But it's not all bad news. In April 2005, riding high on the back of a closer trade relations with Venezuela and China, Fidel Castro announced plans to double the minimum wage from 100 pesos a month (CUC$4) to 225 pesos (CUC$9). While the increase might sound laughable by any Western standard, the move stood to directly benefit 1.6 million Cuban workers including farmhands and plumbers.

LIFESTYLE

Cuban socialism dances to its own drummer. Though housing is free, shortages mean three or even four generations might live under the same roof, which gets tight in a two-bedroom apartment. This also cramps budding love lives and Cubans will tell you it's the reason the country has one of the world's highest divorce rates. Gays and lesbians, who do not have the option of getting married and living with the family, are in a particularly difficult spot vis-à-vis their private affairs. On the flip side, a full house means there's almost always someone to babysit, take care of you when you're sick or do the shopping while you're at work.

Cuban women have been liberated in the sense that they have access to education and training of whatever sort they desire. In fact, women make up 66.4% of the professional and technical workforce. But, like everywhere, a glass ceiling still exists in some fields (eg politics) and the home is still largely the woman's responsibility, which translates to a 'double work day' – women go to work and then come home, to work. Thanks to specific governmental policies, such as one year guaranteed maternity leave and free day care, it's easier being a mother *and* a career woman in Cuba. Children are an integral part of life and kids are everywhere – the theater, church, restaurants and rock concerts. It's refreshing that Cubans don't drastically alter their lives once they become parents.

That women are turning to hustling to make some extra cash or attain baubles is disturbing. While some *jineteras* (a woman who attaches herself to male foreigners for monetary or material gain) are straight-up hookers, others are just getting friendly with foreigners for the perks they provide: a ride in a car, a night out in a fancy disco or a new pair of jeans. Some are after more, others nothing at all. It's a complicated state of affairs and can be especially confusing for male travelers who get swept up in it.

Most homes don't have a phone or computer, infinitesimally few have Internet access and disposable income is an oxymoron. All of this has a huge effect on lifestyle. What makes Cuba different from somewhere like Bolivia or Appalachia though, is the government's heavy subsidies of every facet of life, especially culture. Consider the fact that in Habana there are some 200 movie theaters and a ticket costs two pesos (US$0.08), or that a front-row seat at the Gran Teatro de la Habana costs 10 pesos (US$0.40), rap concerts cost two pesos and a patch of cement bench at the ballpark is one peso (US$0.04). Now if only there was the transport to get there. Still, with a set of dominoes or a guitar, a bottle of rum and a group of friends, who needs baseball or the ballet?

ECONOMY

Nearly destroyed during the economic meltdown that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Cuban economy has defied all logic by its continued survival. Given new life with a three-pronged recovery plan in 1993 that included the legalization of the US dollar (retracted in 2004), the limited opening up of the private sector and the frenzied promotion of the tourist industry in resort areas such as Varadero and Cayo Coco, net advances have been slow but steady with much of the benefits yet to filter down to the average person on the street in Habana or Santiago. Throwing off its heavy reliance on old staples such as sugar and tobacco Cuba's recent economic development has spun inexorably toward Latin America in the shape of new trade agreements such as the 2004 ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas) accords that have exchanged Cuban medical know-how for Venezuelan oil. Other modern economic mainstays include nickel mining (Cuba is the world's third largest producer) and pharmaceuticals.

The US spends US$4176 per person annually on health care. In embargo-strapped Cuba the government coughs up $186 per head to finance their citizens. Yet the overall health indices (life expectancy, infant mortality rates) in both countries are almost the same.

POPULATION

The slave trade and the triumph of the Cuban revolution are two of the most important factors in Cuba's population mix. From Santería traditions to popular slang, Afro-Cuban culture is an integral part of the national identity. According to the 2002 official census Cuba's racial breakdown is 51% mulatto, 37% white, 11% black and 1% Chinese. Aside from the obvious Spanish legacy, many of the so-called 'white' population are the descendants of French immigrants who arrived on the island in various waves during the early part of the 19th century. Indeed, the cities of Guantánamo, Cienfuegos and Santiago were all either pioneered or heavily influenced by French émigrés and much of Cuba's coffee and sugar industry owes its development to French entrepreneurship.

The black diaspora is also made up of an eclectic mix of different elements. Numerous Haitians and Jamaicans came to Cuba to work in the sugar fields in the 1920s and they brought many of their customs and traditions with them. Their descendants can be found in Guantánamo and Santiago in the Oriente or places such as Venezuela in Ciego de Ávila Province where Haitian voodoo liturgies are still practiced. Another important immigrant town is Baraguá in Ciego de Ávila, which is famous for its English-speaking West Indian community who still celebrate their annual 'freedom day' each August with a game of cricket.

THE RATION CARD

The *libreta* (ration card) was created in 1962 to provide a basic social safety net for the population and to limit price gouging on basic goods via the black market. During the relatively affluent '70s and '80s, with Soviet subsidized products pouring into Cuba, it seemed that the card might be on the way out, but the economic crisis of the '90s has ensured its survival.

The basic 30-product monthly food basket allotted to every Cuban includes 2.7kg of rice, 1.5kg of refined sugar and 1kg of brown sugar, 0.25kg of beans, a measly amount of coffee, 2kg of salt, 0.25kg of cooking oil and 1.5kg of pasta. Everyone receives one toilet roll a day, plus soap and toothpaste. Chicken, hot dogs, fish and vegetables are distributed pending availability. Another 29 products are distributed irregularly on a per family basis, including cornmeal, food paste, crackers and tinned tomatoes. Children up to the age of one get two bottles of fresh or condensed milk monthly, plus soy yogurt every other day. Children to the age of seven get an allotment of powdered milk. Pensioners, pregnant women and those with certain chronic diseases or special diets (eg for high cholesterol) also receive special rations.

Rationed goods are sold at bodegas (government stores), at subsidized peso prices that haven't changed for years. The same items sold freely without ration cards at farmers markets cost 20 times more. Bodegas often sell items *libre* (outside the ration card), meaning anyone, including foreigners, can buy those products. Maintaining the ration system is a serious drain on state finances, but without it many Cubans would suffer real hardship in a society where the circulation of two unequal currencies has created tangible class differences. As it is, the monthly ration is only a supplement that must somehow be topped up elsewhere.

The invitation to partake in free education up to university level had Cubans pouring into the cities from the countryside after the revolution, so that today the urban population is a top-heavy 75%. In efforts to stem or reverse this trend the government offered land incentives to urbanites during the *período especial* to encourage resettling in rural areas, and since May 1998 Cubans have needed official permission to relocate to Habana.

There are no official class breakdowns in Cuba although class divisions based on income have begun to rear their ugly head since the beginning of the *período especial*. More refreshingly, Cuba is one of the few countries in the world where the notion of doffing your cap to someone of higher social stature is virtually nonexistent.

SPORT

Considered a right of the masses, professional sport was abolished by the government after the revolution. Performance-wise it was the best thing the new administration could have done. Since 1959 Cuba's Olympic medal haul has rocketed into the stratosphere. The crowning moment came in 1992 when Cuba – a country of 11 million people who languish 172nd on the world's 'rich list', in between Mongolia and the Central African Republic – brought home 14 gold medals and finished fifth on the overall medals table. It's a testament to Cuba's high sporting standards that their 11th place finish in Athens in 2004 was considered something of a national failure.

Characteristically the sporting obsession starts at the top. Fidel Castro is widely renowned for his baseball hitting prowess, but what is less known is his personal commitment to the establishment a widely-accessible national sporting curriculum at all levels. In 1961 the National Institute of Sport, Physical Education and Recreation (Inder) founded a system of sport for the masses that eradicated discrimination and integrated children from a young age. By offering paid leisure-time to workers and dropping entrance fees to major sports events the organization caused participation in popular sports to multiply tenfold by the 1970s and the knock-on effect to performance was tangible.

Cuban *pelota* (baseball) is legendary and the country is riveted during the October to March regular season, turning rabid for the play-offs in April. You'll see passions running high in the main square of provincial capitals, where fans debate minute details of the game with lots of finger-wagging in what is known as a *peña deportiva* (fan club) or *esquina caliente* (hot corner). These are among the most opinionated venues in Cuba and the *esquina* in Habana's Parque Central (p101) is highly entertaining, especially in the postseason when funereal wreaths and offerings to *orishas* (Santería deities) appear for eliminated teams and those still contending. Sometimes a Cuban player is lured to the US, like José Ariel Contreras, who pitched for Pinar, but now earns millions playing for the Chicago White Sox (he formerly played for the Yankees). Most players, however, shun the big money bait and the opportunity to play in baseball's greatest stadiums, opting instead to continue earning the equivalent of US$13 per month – decisions that make their athletic achievements all the more admirable.

Cuba won the first ever Olympic baseball tournament held in Barcelona in 1992 thumping the US in the semifinals and Taiwan in the final.

Cuba is also a giant in amateur boxing, as indicated by champions Teófilo Stevenson, who brought home Olympic gold in 1972, 1976 and 1980, and Félix Savón, another triple medal winner, most recently in 2000. Every sizable town has an arena called a *sala polivalente,* where big boxing events take place, while training and smaller matches happen at gyms, many of which train Olympic athletes. Travelers interested in sparring lessons or seeing a match should drop in at a gym (see individual regional chapters for information). For boxing shows, ask around at the local *sala polivalente* or keep an eye out for posters advertising upcoming bouts. As with all sporting events in Cuba, entrance to professional-standard (though technically amateur) shows is cheap and relatively hassle-free.

Basketball, volleyball (the national women's team won gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games) and, to a lesser extent, football are all popular in Cuba, but *dominó* (always referred to in the singular) and chess, both considered sports, are national passions. Self-taught José Raúl Capablanca, touted as the greatest ever natural chess player, became World Chess Champion in 1921 and you'll see chess matches on the street and read about the masters in the sports pages. *Dominó* is everywhere and you'll see quartets of old men and young bucks slugging back shots of rum and slamming down their tiles in every Cuban neighborhood. In March 2003 Habana hosted the first annual Campeonato Mundial de Dominó (World Domino Championship), with 10 countries and thousands of players participating. The finals were held in Ciudad Deportiva, where Cuba won it all. Cockfighting, while technically illegal, is still practiced widely in Cuba (see p210) with clandestine shows attracting a large number of mainly male spectators who come to gamble away their hard-earned pesos.

My Footsteps in Baraguá (1996) is an English-speaking documentary made by Cuban director Gloria Rolando about Cuba's extensive West-Indian population from Jamaica and Barbados, who have resettled in the Ciego de Ávila town of Baraguá.

MULTICULTURALISM

Despite the fact that institutionalized racism was abolished by law after the revolution, Cuba is still facing up to the difficult challenges of establishing lasting racial equality in a widely cosmopolitan and multicultural society. While there are no ghettos or gangs in Cuba's larger cities, a quick tally of the roaming *jineteros/as* in Vedado and Habana Vieja will reveal a far higher proportion of black participants. On the other side of the coin, over 90% of Cuban exiles are of white descent and of the victorious rebel army that took control of the government in 1959 only a handful (Juan Almeida being the most obvious example) were of mixed heritage.

MEDIA

In a country replete with writers, scribes and poets, Cuba's media is without doubt one of the revolution's greatest failures. The only daily national newspaper – a dour eight-paged tabloid called *Granma* – is an insipid dose of politics, politics and yet more politics, all of which pours forth from the all-pervading, all-encompassing propaganda ministries of the Cuban Communist Party.

The silencing of the press was one of Castro's first political acts on taking power in 1959. Challenged with the crime of speaking out against the revolution, nearly all of Cuba's once independent newspapers were either closed down or taken over by the state by the summer of 1960. Many freelance operators faced a similar fate. In 1965 Guillermo Cabrera Infante, one of Cuba's most respected writers left for an ignominious exile in London after serving as a cultural attaché in Brussels while, three years later, Castro's former journalistic guru, Carlos Franqui – the man who had been responsible for the establishment of rebel newspaper *Revolución* in the Sierra Maestra – earned his own place on the black list for daring to speak out in opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Of the 110 journalists imprisoned throughout the world in 2005, 23 were incarcerated in Cuba.

Although art, music and culture are actively encouraged in Cuban society, writers of all genres are set strict limits. Budding conformists, such as national poet, Nicolas Guillén, enjoy prestige, patronage and a certain amount of artistic freedom, while dissidents – Franqui, Infante and Herberto Padilla to name but three – face oppression, incarceration and the knowledge that their hard-won literary reputation will be quickly airbrushed out of Cuban history.

Despite some relaxation of press restrictions since the heavy-handed days of the 1970s and '80s, Cuban journalists must still operate inside strict press laws that prohibit the use of antigovernment propaganda and ban the seemingly innocuous act of 'insulting officials in public', a crime that carries a three year jail term.

Other limitations include the prohibition of private ownership of the electronic media and a law that prohibits foreign news agencies from hiring local journalists without first going through official government channels.

Most foreign observers, both in and outside of Cuba, agree that the Cuban media situation is an unmitigated disaster. Furthermore, in 2005 the New York–based Committee to Protect Journalists revealed that Cuba was one of the world's leading jailers of journalists.

RELIGION

Religion is among the most misunderstood, misrepresented (by Castro's critics) and complex aspects of Cuban culture. Before the revolution 85% of Cubans were nominal Roman Catholics, though only 10% attended church regularly. Protestants made up most of the rest of the church-going public, though a smattering of Jews and Muslims have always practiced in Cuba and still do. When the revolution triumphed, 140 Catholic priests were expelled for reactionary political activities and another 400 left voluntarily, while the majority of Protestants, who represented society's poorer sector, had less to lose and stayed.

When the government declared itself Marxist-Leninist and therefore atheist, life for *creyentes* (literally 'believers') took on new difficulties. Though church services were never banned and freedom of religion never revoked, Christians were sent to Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (UMAPs; Military Production Aid Units), where it was hoped hard labor might reform their religious ways; homosexuals and vagrants were also sent to the fields to work. This was a short-lived experiment, however. More trying for believers were the hard-line Soviet days of the '70s and '80s when they were prohibited from joining the communist party and few, if any, believers held political posts. Certain university careers, notably in the humanities, were off-limits as well.

Things have changed dramatically since then, particularly in 1992 when the constitution was revised, removing all references to the Cuban state as Marxist-Leninist and recapturing the laical nature of the Cuban government. This led to an aperture in civil and political society for

CUBAN RELIGIONS OF AFRICAN ORIGIN

The complex religious rites of Regla de Ocha, or Santería as it is more widely known, offer a fascinating glimpse into the ancient traditions that permeate modern Cuba's ancient African soul.

The practice first took root in the 17th and 18th centuries when thousands of Yoruba slaves transported from West Africa brought with them a system of animistic beliefs that they hid beneath a Catholic veneer. Keeping tribes together in order to pit one group against another, the Spanish – who summarily baptized their new brethren on arrival – unwittingly allowed the practice of African religions to persist and prosper. Their survival depended on the convergence of ancient Yoruba beliefs with those of traditional Catholicism into a practice that came to be known as Santería (a derisive term invented by the Spanish).

By the 18th century, tribes such as the Arará, the Lucumí and the Congo were allowed to organize themselves into *cabildos* (associations). These *cabildos* provided entertainment, involving dance and music, on feast days for Catholic saints. Meanwhile, away from the spotlight, the slaves had begun to practice a crude form of their own religious worship, replacing each Catholic saint with an equivalent Yoruba *orisha* (a Santería deity).

Among the most important *orishas* is the androgynous creator god Obatalá, who is always dressed in white and associated with Christ or Nuestra Señora de la Merced. Obatalá's wife, Odudúa, goddess of the underworld, is replicated in a similar way by the image of the Virgin. Obatalá's son, Elegguá (St Anthony), is the god of destiny. Yemayá, the goddess of the ocean and mother of all *orishas,* is identified by the color blue and associated with Nuestra Señora de Regla. Changó, the Yoruba god of fire and war, lives in the tops of the royal palm trees and controls the lightning; his color is red and he's associated with Santa Bárbara. His son Aggayú Solá, god of land and protector of travelers, is associated with San Cristóbal (St Christopher). Ochún, wife of Changó and companion of Yemayá, is the goddess of love and the rivers, and is associated with Cuba's patron saint, the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre (whose color is yellow). Ogún is associated with John the Baptist. Babalú Ayé (St Lazarus) is the *orisha* of disease.

It's likely there are more followers of the Afro-Cuban religions than practicing Roman Catholics in contemporary Cuba and although Regla de Ocha is by far the largest group it is by no means the only strand. *Orishas* in Santería, differ significantly from Catholic saints in the sense that they are fallible. The concepts of original sin and a final judgment are unknown. Instead, ancestral spirits are worshipped.

The rites of Santería are controlled by a male priest called a *babalawo,* of whom there are estimated to be 4000 in Cuba. The *babalawos* are often consulted for advice, to cure sicknesses or to grant protection, and offerings are placed before a small shrine in his home. Other rituals involve ecstatic dance, singing chants and animal sacrifice. The blood of animals such as chickens, doves and goats is offered to the *orishas* along with fruit and herbs at elaborate ceremonies as the *babalawo* sprays rum onto the altar from his mouth.

Cubans are surprisingly open about Santería, and travelers are welcome to inspect household shrines and attend ceremonies. Many hotels stage special Santería shows for visitors, but to uncover the real essence of Regla de Ocha you'll have to scratch a little deeper underneath the surface. Get talking at your casa particular, hang around the urban hotbeds (Guanabacoa in Habana, or Matanzas) or take to the streets and follow the sound of the drums. Don't forget to take a gift for the *orishas*.

religious adherents and leaders and other reforms; for example, believers are now eligible for party membership. Since Cuban Catholicism gained the papal seal of approval with Pope John Paul II's visit in 1998, church attendance has surged and posters welcoming him are still displayed with pride. It's worth noting that churches have a strong youth presence. There are currently 400,000 Catholics regularly attending mass and 300,000 Protestants from 54 denominations. More evangelical denominations such as the Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostals are rapidly growing in popularity.

The religious beliefs of Africans brought to Cuba as slaves were originally layered over Catholic iconography and doctrines, eventually forming new belief systems; see the boxed text p59. Santería is the most widespread of these and is an integrated part of daily life here; you'll see initiates dressed in white everywhere you go and many homes have altars tucked into the corners. Santería has served as a cultural ambassador of sorts, with new museums and dance and drum performances becoming standard itinerary fare. Some take exception to this 'folkloricization' of the sacred – dressing all in white has now become fashionable whether you're initiated or not, for example – and curious tourists may be taken to consultations with *babalawos* (priests) more interested in your money than your dilemmas.

ARTS

In contrast to other communist countries, Cuba's reputation as a powerhouse of art and culture is nothing short of staggering. Each provincial town, no matter how small, has a Casa de Cultura that stages everything from traditional salsa music to innovative comedy nights and, on top of this, countless other theaters, organizations and institutions bring highbrow art to the masses completely free of charge.

In 1930 Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca escaped corrupt New York for harmonious Habana. Appearing as a guest university speaker he later described his three month stay in Cuba as 'the time of his life.'

The quality of what's on offer is equally amazing. The Cubans seem to have made a habit out of taking almost any artistic genre and replicating it perfectly. You'll pick up first-class Flamenco, ballet, classical music and Shakespearean theater here in the most mundane of places, not to mention Lorca plays, alternative cinema and illuminating deconstructions of novels by the likes of Márquez and Carpentier.

Several governmental organizations countrywide oversee the work of writers and artists, including the revered Casa de las Américas, the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (Uneac; National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists) and its junior counterpart, Asociacíon Hermanos Saíz.

For information on Cuban music, check out the Music chapter (p66).

Literature

In a country strewn with icons like rice at a wedding, José Martí (1853–95) is the master. Visionary, patriot and rebel, he was also a literary giant whose collected plays, essays and poetry fill 30 volumes. Exiled for his writings before he was 20, Martí lived most of his life outside Cuba, primarily in the US. His last book of poetry, *Versos Sencillos* (Simple Verses), is, as the title proclaims, full of simple verses and is arguably one of his best. Though written more than a century ago, the essays collected in *Nuestra America* (Our America) and *Los Estados Unidos* (The United States) are remarkably forward-thinking, providing a basis for Latin American self-determination in the face of US hegemony. For more on Martí's role as Cuban independence leader, see the History chapter (p38).

Like Martí, mulatto Nicolás Guillén (1902–89) is considered one of Cuba's world-class poets. Ahead of his time, he was one of the first mainstream champions of Afro-Cuban culture, writing rhythmic poems such as *Sóngoro Cosongo* (1931). A Communist who believed in social and racial equality, Guillén lived in exile during Batista's regime, writing *Elegía a Jesús Menéndez* (1951) and *La Paloma de Vuelo Popular* (*Elegías;* 1958). Some of his most famous poems are available in the English collection entitled *New Love Poetry: Elegy* (University of Toronto). He returned after the revolution and cofounded the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Cubanas (Uneac). Guillén was Cuba's national poet until his death.

Cubans are crazy for poetry, so don't be surprised when someone starts reeling off verses by Dulce María Loynaz (1902–97), recipient of Spain's coveted Miguel de Cervantes award; Eliseo Diego (1920–94), the poet's poet, whose words give wings to the human spirit; or singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, who is a good guitar player, but a great poet (see p176).

In literature, as in poetry, the Cuban bibliography is awe inspiring. Novelist Alejo Carpentier (1904–80) was another exiled writer, returning after the revolution to write *El Recurso del Método* (Resource of Method) and *Concierto Barroco,* both published in 1974. The latter is considered his masterpiece. Habana fans will want to check out his *Ciudad de las Columnas* (The City of Columns; 1970), which juxtaposes B&W photographs of the city's architectural details with insightful prose.

Paradiso by José Lezama Lima (1910–76) was a 'scandalous novel' when it appeared in 1966 because of its erotic (homosexual) scenes. Now it's considered a classic. Lezama was a poet and essayist who cofounded the influential magazine *Orígenes* in 1944.

Notable writers who left Cuba after the revolution include playwright Reinaldo Arenas, whose autobiography *Before Night Falls* (1943–90) was made into a critically acclaimed drama for the silver screen; and Guillermo Cabrera Infante (b 1929), whose *Tres Tristes Tigres* (Three Trapped Tigers; 1967) describes cultural decadence during the Batista era. Of course, Cuba's most famous foreign writer-in-residence was Ernest Hemingway, who wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in the Ambos Mundos Hotel in Habana (p118).

Hollywood actor Andy Garcia – star of *The Untouchables, The Godfather III* and *Ocean's Eleven* – was born Andrés Arturo Garcia in Habana in 1956, but moved to Miami with his family at the age of five.

Cinema & Television

The film industry is run by the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, better known as Icaic, and it has been creating quality films since its founding in 1959. You can't talk about Icaic and not Alfredo Guevara, the institute's longtime director. Guevara is recognized, along with several influential filmmakers including Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (aka Titón, 1928–96), as the spinal column of Cuban cinema. Themes that aren't generally explored in other parts of Cuban society (bureaucratic paranoia, homosexuality and misogyny for starters) are given full airtime in Cuban movies and this quasi-autonomous, critical space carved out by Icaic is almost one-of-a-kind; *nueva trova* (philosophical folk/guitar music) commentary comes close, but few songs are as explicit as the film *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate) for example.

Cuba's macro-cultural approach has fueled other mediums, including animation and video, genres that cinema snobs might sniff at but which are full-blown industries here. Movies, shorts, videos and animation from all over the hemisphere can be seen at the annual Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in Habana (p457), which is like Cannes without the ass kissing. To say that Cubans are cinema buffs is an understatement: the crush of a crowd shattered the glass doors of a movie

theater during the 2001 festival and an adoring mob nearly rioted trying to get into Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* premier in 2002. If you're headed for a flick, queue early.

Viva Cuba (2005), written and directed by Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti, is Cuba's most recent internationally-profiled cinematic offering. Billed as part Romeo-and-Juliet romance and part quirky coming-of-age road movie, it tells the story of two children from vastly different Cuban backgrounds who travel across the length of the country in order to find a lost relative. Mixing humor with pathos the movie, which is ostensibly about the emigration issue, covers a multitude of different aspects of Cuban life and is, in the words of its director Cremata 'the story of everything that is happening in Cuba today.'

Cuban TV is special (not least of all because the most unattractive people you're likely to see in Cuba are on it). There are only three national channels, no commercials and charming touches (eg the nightly programming announcement closes with the advisory: 'consume only what is necessary'). Educational programming dominates, with Universidad Para Todos offering full university-level courses in everything from astronomy to film editing and Canal Educativo broadcasting primary and secondary classes. The news is a predictable litany of good things Cuba has done (eg big tobacco harvest, sending doctors to Africa) and bad things the US is up to (eg mucking around in the Middle East, big corporations buying influence). *Mesa Redonda* (Round Table) is a nightly program where several people sharing the same opinion sit around discussing a topic of national or global import. *Telenovelas* (soap operas) are a national obsession and things often grind to a halt when the *telenovela* starts.

In 1983 Cuban exiles in Miami blocked the filming of the Brian de Palma movie *Scarface* in their home city after writer Oliver Stone refused to yield to their demands to include scenes of anti-Castro activity in the script.

Architecture

Stylistically-speaking, Cuba is a smorgasbord of different architectural genres with influences ranging from Spanish Moorish to French neo-classical to decorative colonial-baroque. Emerging relatively unscathed from the turmoil of three separate revolutionary wars, well-preserved cities such as Camagüey, Santiago and the capital Habana have survived into the 21st century with the bulk of their original colonial features remarkably intact. The preservation has been aided further by the nomination of Trinidad, Cienfuegos and Habana Vieja as Unesco World Heritage sites.

Some of Cuba's oldest and most engaging architectural creations can be seen in the network of Spanish fortresses erected around the country during the 16th and 17th centuries to deter attacks from pirates and corsairs on the island's coastal cities. Notable examples include Habana's Castillo de la Real Fuerza (p96), the second oldest fort in the Americas; the labyrinthine Castillo de San Pedro del Morro (p404), in Santiago, designed by Italian military architect Giovanni Bautista Antonelli; and the massive Cabaña (p161) overlooking Habana Bay, the largest fort in the Americas.

Cuban townscapes in the 17th and 18th centuries were dominated by ecclesial architecture, reflected initially in the noble cloisters of Habana's Convento de Santa Clara (p98) built in 1632, and culminating a century or so later in the magnificent Catedral de San Cristóbal (p93), considered by many as the country's most outstanding baroque monument. Some of the best architecture from this period can be viewed in Habana Vieja whose peculiar layout around *four* main squares – each with its own specific social or religious function – set it apart from other Spanish colonial capitals.

With a booming economy and cash raked in from a series of record-breaking sugarcane harvests, plantation-owners in the small town of Trinidad had money to burn at the start of the 19th century. Ideally positioned to the south of the verdant Valle de los Ingenios and heavily influenced by haute couture furnishings of Italy, France and Georgian England, the city's enterprising sugar merchants ploughed their vast industrial profits into a revitalized new city full of exquisite homes and businesses that juxtaposed popular baroque and neoclassical styles with vernacular Cuban features such as wooden *rejas* (grilles), high ceilings, and tiny *postigos* (doors). Isolated on the southern coast and protected by law as part of a Unesco World Heritage site, the unique and beautiful streets of 19th-century Trinidad remain one of Latin America's most intact colonial cities.

By the mid-19th century sturdy neoclassical buildings were the norm among the country's native bourgeoisie in cities such as Cienfuegos and Matanzas with bold symmetrical lines, grandiose frontages and rows of imposing columns replacing the decorative baroque flourishes of the early colonial period. The style reached its high water mark in an impressive trio of glittering theaters: the Caridad in Santa Clara (p276), the Sauto in Matanzas (p228) and the Terry Tomás in Cienfuegos (p259). In the 1920s and '30s a neoclassical revival delivered a brand new clutch of towering giants onto the Habana skyline, including the Washington-influenced Capitolio (p99), the monumental Hotel Nacional (p104) and the Athenian Universidad de la Habana (p104).

Eclecticism was the leading style in the new republican era post-1902, with a combination of regurgitated genres such as neo-Gothic, neo-baroque, neo-renaissance and neo-Moorish giving rise to a hotchpotch of groundbreaking buildings that were as eye-catching as they were outrageous. For a wild tour of Cuban eclecticism check out the Museo de Ciencias Naturales Sandalio de Noda in Pinar del Río (p196), the Presidential Palace (now the Museo de la Revolución) in Habana (p102) or the Byzantium-meets-Arabic Palacio de Valle in Cienfuegos (p259).

Fidel and Hemingway met only once at a 1960 fishing tournament organized by Hemingway in Habana. Not surprisingly, the combative Castro won first prize.

Bridging the gap between eclecticism and modernism was art deco, a lavish architectural style epitomized in structures such as New York's Chrysler building, but best manifested in Cuba in Habana's opulent Bacardí building (p113) or some of the religious iconology exhibited in the Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón (p108).

Modernism arrived in Habana in the 1950s with a rapid surge of prerevolutionary skyscrapers that eliminated decorative flourishes and merged 'function' rather harmoniously with 'form.' Visitors can pursue this rich architectural legacy in the cubic Hotel Habana Libre (p104) or the skyline-hogging Focsa building (p104), an edifice that was constructed – legend has it – without the use of a single crane.

Painting & Sculpture

Painting and sculpture is alive and well in Cuba, despite more than four decades of asphyxiating on-off censorship. From the archaic cave paintings of Cueva Punta del Este on Isla de la Juventud to the vibrant poster art of 1960s Habana, a colorful and broad-ranging artistic pastiche has been painstakingly conserved through arts schools, government sponsorship and an eclectic mix of cross-cultural influences that include everything from Diego Rivera–style murals to European avant-gardism.

Engaging and visceral, modern Cuban art combines lurid Afro–Latin American colors with the harsh reality of a 47-year-old revolution. For

visiting foreign art lovers it's a unique and intoxicating brew. Forced into a corner by the constrictions of the culture-redefining Cuban Revolution, budding artists have invariably found that, by co-opting with (as opposed to confronting) the socialist regime, opportunities for academic training and artistic encouragement are almost unlimited. Encased in such a volatile creative climate the concept of graphic art in Cuba – well-established in its own right before the revolution – has flourished exponentially.

Serigraphy was first employed on the island at the beginning of the 20th century, but this distinctive style of silk-screen printing didn't gather ground until the 1940s when, in connection with film and political posters, it enjoyed a wide distribution. The genre exploded after the 1959 revolution when bodies such as Icaic and the propagandist Editora Política were enthusiastically sponsored by the Castro government to create thousands of informative posters designed to rally the Cuban population behind the huge tasks of building a 'New Society.' Eschewing standard Soviet realism, Cuban poster artists mixed inherent Latin American influences with the eye-catching imagery of 1960s pop culture to create a brand new subgenre of their own. This innovative form of poster art can best be viewed at the Taller de Serigrafia Rene Portocarrero in Habana Vieja (p139).

The 1964 Cuban/Soviet film *Soy Cuba* (I am Cuba) has recently been resurrected as an erstwhile movie classic by a clutch of contemporary directors such as Martin Scorcese for its highly innovative tracking shots and poetic plot.

Internationally-speaking, art in Cuba is dominated by the prolific figure of Wilfredo Lam, a painter, sculptor and ceramicist of mixed Chinese, African and Spanish ancestry. Born in Sagua Grande, Villa Clara Province in 1902, Lam studied art and law in Habana before departing for Madrid in 1923 to pursue his artistic ambitions in the fertile fields of post-WWI Europe. Displaced by the Spanish Civil War in 1937 he gravitated toward France where he became friends with Pablo Picasso and swapped ideas with the pioneering surrealist André Breton. Having absorbed various cubist and surrealist influences, Lam returned to Cuba in 1941 where he produced his own seminal masterpiece *La Jungla* (the Jungle), considered by critics to be one of the Third World's most representative paintings.

Post-Lam Cuba's unique artistic heritage has survived and prospered in Habana's Centro Wilfredo Lam (p93) and the Instituto Superior de Arte (p148) in outlying Cubanacán. The capital is also blessed with a splendid national art museum, the sprawling Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (p102) housed in two separate buildings. Outside of Habana further inspiration can be found in scattered artistic communities in the cities of Santiago, Camagüey and Baracoa. Diehards can also uncover notable artistic work hiding beneath the surface in other less heralded cultural outposts such as Las Tunas (known locally as the 'city of sculptures').

Theater & Dance

Cuban ballet is synonymous with prima ballerina Alicia Alonso. After her pointe days she cofounded the Ballet Nacional de Cuba and her choreography is still in heavy rotation – classic stuff such as *Don Quixote* and *Giselle,* with few surprises. The International Ballet Festival (p457) takes Habana by storm every other year, when you can see a *Swan Lake* matinee and an evening performance of *Carmen* – a ballet junkie's dream. The Ballet de Camagüey also features talented dancers, with a riskier, less formal, repertory.

Modern dance, mixing ballet, folklore and sensualized choreography, is the purview of DanzAbierta, Así Somos (founded by US-born Lorna Burdsall in 1981) and Danza Teatro Retazos. The latter is directed by Ecuadorian spitfire Isabel Bustos, who also organizes the Encuentro Internacional de Danza en Paisajes Urbanos, an event that sees national and international dance companies take over the streets of Habana Vieja. Danza Contemporánea de Cuba (also cofounded by Burdsall) blends ballet with Cuban rhythms and themes that some purists find too commercial. Still, the dancing is exceptional and the company has fresh choreography, costuming and storytelling ideas. The flexible Lizt Alfonso company has been repeatedly turning heads lately with their unique blend of Cuban, African and Spanish rhythms and moves. Look for their work called *Elementos*.

In response to the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, Cuba sent 2260 health workers to Pakistan, 1400 of them doctors, where they have attended to more than 200,000 patients.

The repertory of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (founded in 1962) is a veritable history of Cuban popular dance, and the palpitating rainbow of traditional Afro-Cuban dances they perform often has Teatro Mella audiences on their feet. You can rumba along with them every Saturday at Habana's El Gran Palenque (p133). La Colmenita is Cuba's respected National Children's Theater Company whose cast of seven- to 15-year-olds interprets classics such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Of course, Cuba also means salsa. Kids here pair off as soon as they can walk and once the basic steps and turns are rote they move on to *la rueda* (the wheel), where two concentric circles move in opposite directions – boys on the outside, girls on the inside – with each pair taking a twirl together before the wheel turns and they're dancing with someone new. It's as hard as it looks, and you might want to look into some classes when you arrive (see p454).

Music

'In Cuba the music flows like a river,' wrote Ry Cooder in his sleeve notes to the seminal *Buena Vista Social Club* CD, 'It takes care of you and rebuilds you from the inside out.'

Rich, vibrant, layered and soulful, Cuban music has long acted as a standard bearer for the sounds and rhythms emanating out of Latin America. From the down-at-heel docks of Matanzas to the bucolic local villages of the Sierra Maestra, everything from *son,* salsa, rumba, mambo, *chachachá, charanga* and *danzón* owe at least a part of their existence to the magical musical dynamism that was first ignited here.

Aside from the obvious Spanish and African roots, Cuban music has intermittently called upon a number of other important influences in the process of its embryonic development. Mixed into an already exotic melting pot are genres from France, the United States, Haiti and Jamaica. Conversely Cuban music has also played a key role in developing various melodic styles and movements in other parts of the world. In Spain they called this process *ida y vuelta* (return music) and it is most clearly evident in a style of Nuevo flamenco called *Guajira*. Elsewhere the 'Cuban effect' can be traced back to forms as diverse as New Orleans jazz, New York salsa and West African Afrobeat.

Hello, Goodbye. In January 2000 Paul McCartney became the only member of The Beatles to visit Cuba when he stopped over for four hours in Santiago de Cuba during the course of a vacation in the Caicos Islands. Popping into the Casa de la Trova he enjoyed a brief set of traditional music before heading for lunch in the nearby Restaurante El Morro.

FOLKLORIC ROOTS

Son, Cuba's instantly recognizable signature music, first emerged from the mountains of the Oriente region in the second half of the 19th century; though the earliest known testimonies go back as far as 1570. Famously described by Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz as 'a love affair between the African drum and the Spanish guitar,' the roots of this eclectic and intricately fused rural music lie in two distinct subgenres: rumba and *danzón*.

While drumming in the North American colonies was ostensibly prohibited, the Spanish were slightly less mean-spirited in the treatment of their African brethren. As a result Cuban slaves were able to preserve and pass on many of their musical traditions via influential Santería *cabildos,* religious brotherhoods that re-enacted ancient African percussive music on simple *batá* drums or *chequeré* rattles. Performed at annual festivals or on special Catholic saint's days, this rhythmic yet highly textured dance music was offered up as a form of religious worship to the *orishas* (deities).

Over time the ritualistic drumming of Santería evolved into a more complex genre known as rumba. Rumba first metamorphosed in the dock areas of Habana and Matanzas during the 1890s when slaves, exposed to itinerant foreign influences, began to knock out rhythmic patterns on old cargo boxes in their spare time. Vocals were added, dances emerged, and pretty soon the music had grown into a collective form of social expression for all black Afro-Cubans.

Rumba music today has three basic forms: *guaguancó* (an overtly sexual dance), *yambú* (a slow couple's dance) and *columbia* (a fast aggressive male dance often involving fire torches and machetes).

On the other side of the musical equation sat *danzón,* a type of refined European dance closely associated with the French contredanse or the English 'country dance' of the 19th century. Pioneered by innovative Matanzas band leader Miguel Failde in the 1880s, the Cuban *danzón* quickly developed its own peculiar syncopated rhythm borrowing heavily from Haitian slave influences and, later on, adding such improbable extras as conga drums and vocalists. By the early 20th century Cuban *danzóns* had evolved from a stately ballroom dance played by an *orchestra típica* into a more jazzed up free-for-all known alternatively as *charanga, danzonete* or *danzón-chá*.

Welded together, rumba and *danzón* provided the musical backbone that ultimately paved the way for *son,* a distinctive blend of anticipated African rhythms and melodic rustic guitars over which a singer would improvise from a traditional 10-line Spanish poem known as a *décima*.

In its pure form, *son* was played by a sextet consisting of guitar, *tres* (guitar with three sets of double strings), double bass, bongo and two singers who played maracas and *claves* (sticks that tap out the beat). Arising from the precipitous mountains of Cuba's influential east, the genre's earliest exponents were the legendary Trio Oriental, who stabilized the sextet format in 1912 when they were reborn as the Sexteto Habanero. Another early *sonero* was singer Miguel Matamoros, whose self-penned *son* classics such as *Son de la Loma* and *Lagrimas Negras* are de rigueur among Cuba's ubiquitous musical entertainers, even today.

By the 1930s the sexteto had become a septeto with the addition of a trumpet and exciting new musicians such as blind *tres* player Arsenio Rodríguez – a songwriter who Harry Belafonte once called the 'father of salsa' – were paving the way for mambo and *chachachá*.

Cuban mambo king Benny Moré's great-great-grandfather was the king of a tribe in the Congo who was captured by slave traders and sold to a Cuban plantation owner.

EL BÁRBARO DEL RITMO

In the '40s and '50s the *son* bands grew from seven pieces to eight and beyond until they became big bands boasting full horn and percussion sections that played rumba, *chachachá* and mambo. The reigning mambo king was Benny Moré, who, with his velvety voice and rocking 21-piece all-black band, was known as *El Bárbaro del Ritmo* (The Barbarian of Rhythm).

Born in Santa Isabel de las Lajas, Cienfuegos Province in 1919, the eldest of 18 children, Moré quickly became the nexus point for almost every new Cuban sound in production and was largely responsible for placing Cuban music on the international map. Proficient in *son,* mambo, bolero, *guaracha, afro* and *guaguancó* he toured Mexico, Venezuela, Haiti and the US throughout the 1950s and his 40-piece Banda Gigante even performed at Hollywood's Academy Awards ceremony. Few Cubans deny him his place in musical folklore. 'He was a showman and he was the greatest of them all,' said Compay Segundo of Moré years later, 'No one else came near.'

SALSA & JAZZ

Salsa emerged from the fertile Latin New York scene of the '60s and '70s when jazz, *son* and rumba blended to create a new brassier sound. Self-styled queen of salsa Celia Cruz was a leading exponent in the US while Cuba's most famous salsa outfit was (and still is) Los Van Van, formed by Juan Formell in 1969. Still performing regularly throughout the island, Los Van Van won top honors in 2000 when they memorably took home a Grammy for their classic album, *Llego Van Van*.

Jazz, considered the music of the enemy in the revolution's most dogmatic days, has always seeped into Cuban sounds. Jesus 'Chucho' Valdes' band Irakere, formed in 1973, broke the Cuban music scene wide open with its heavy Afro-Cuban drumming laced with jazz and *son*. Jazz also mixed with rap and deep salsa grooves in a new style called *timba,*

championed by NG La Banda, which formed in 1988. Other musicians associated with the Cuban jazz set include pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Isaac Delgado and Adalberto Álvarez y Su Son.

LOS TROVADORES

Initially *trovadores* (traditional singers/songwriters) were like old-fashioned traveling minstrels, itinerant songsmiths who plied their musical trade across the island in the early part of the 20th century, moving from village to village and city to city with the carefree spirit of perennial gypsies. Armed with simple acoustic guitars and furnished with a seemingly limitless repertoire of soft lilting rural ballads, early Cuban *trovadores* included Sindo Garay, Nico Saquito and Joseíto Fernández, the man responsible for composing all-time Cuban blockbuster, *Guantanamera*. As the style developed into the 1960s, new advocates such as Carlos Puebla from Bayamo gave the genre a grittier and more political edge penning classic songs such as *Hasta Siempre Comandante*, his romantic if slightly sycophantic ode to Che Guevara.

Nueva trova was very much a product of the revolution and paralleled – though rarely copied – folk music in the US and the emerging *nueva canción* scene that was taking shape in Chile and Argentina. Stylistically the music also paid indirect homage to the rich tradition of French *chansons* that had been imported into Cuba via Haiti in the 19th century. Political in nature, yet melodic in tone, *nueva trova* first burst forth from the Oriental towns of Manzanillo and Bayamo in the early 1970s before being driven outwards and upwards by such illustrious names as Silvio Rodríguez and native Bayameso Pablo Milanés. Highly influential throughout the Spanish-speaking world during the '60s and '70s, *nueva trova* was often an inspirational source of protest music for the impoverished and downtrodden populations of Latin America, many of whom looked to Cuba for spiritual leadership in an era of corrupt dictatorships and US cultural hegemony. This reciprocated solidarity is echoed in many of Rodríguez's internationally lauded classics such as *Canción Urgente para Nicaragua* (in support of the Sandinistas), *La Maza* (in support of Salvador Allende in Chile) and *Canción para mi Soldado* (in support of Cuban soldiers in Angola).

TROVA: CUBA'S MUSIC HOUSES

In March 1968 – hot on the heels of The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* and Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* – the Castro administration opened up Cuba's first Casa de la Trova in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba. Founded on the philosophy of 'if you can sing or play an instrument, show us what you can do,' these legendary impromptu musical houses quickly became a national phenomenon, spreading in a matter of months to other provincial towns such as Camagüey, Guantánamo and Trinidad.

Aside from offering first-class musical entertainment, *trova* (traditional poetic singing) houses were created with two distinct aims. Firstly, to keep alive Cuba's unique cultural heritage and secondly, to pass its skills and showmanship onto future generations.

In the decades since the 1960s, despite challenges from other embryonic musical genres such as *reggaeton* (Cuban hip-hop), the houses have grown and prospered.

Indeed, in cities such as Santiago de Cuba, a *trova* gig is still considered to be the ultimate artistic accolade, with old stalwarts – such as Buena Vista Social Club luminary Eliades Ochoa – regularly hosting shows, for an entry fee of as little as CUC$2.

For the Cubans, the venues have multiple attractions. At liberty to drink, talk, date and debate inside the smoky dancehalls and atmospheric colonial courtyards that characterize these timeless music houses, cash-pinched locals can salsa energetically into the small hours, temporarily oblivious to the difficulties and hardships that have become a way of life since the onset of the *período especial* (special period).

Culturally speaking, different casas showcase different music depending on the region. In cosmopolitan Santiago de Cuba, *son* is the signature tune while 100km to the east, in provincial Guantánamo, a more rhythmic genre called *chagúi* is king. Head west toward Pinar del Río, however, and you're back in the land of the *Guajira*.

Since the early 1990s Casas de la Trova have welcomed tourists and foreigners in increasing numbers. For the most popular venues check out the individual city sections.

HIP-HOP NATION

Born in the ugly concrete housing projects of Alamar, Habana, Cuban hip-hop, rather like its US counterpart, has gritty and impoverished roots.

First beamed across the nation in the early 1980s when American rap was picked up on homemade rooftop antennae from Miami-based radio stations, the new musical genre quickly gained ground among a population of urban blacks culturally redefining themselves during the inquietude of the *período especial*. By the 1990s groups like Public Enemy and NWA were de rigueur on the streets of Alamar and in 1995 there was enough hip-hop to throw a festival.

Tempered by Latin influences and censored by the parameters of strict revolutionary thought, *reggaeton* has taken on a distinctive flavor all of its own. Instrumentally the music uses *batás* (conical two-headed drums), congos and electric bass, while lyrically the songs tackle important national issues such as sex tourism and the difficulties of the stagnant Cuban economy.

Today there are upwards of 800 hip-hop groups in Cuba and the Cuban Rap Festival (held every August) is entering its second decade. The event even has a sponsor, the fledgling Cuban Rap Agency, a government body formed in 2002 to give official sanction to the country's burgeoning alternative music scene.

MODERN CURRENTS

The contemporary Cuban music scene is an interesting mix of enduring traditions, modern sounds, old hands and new blood. With low production costs, solid urban themes and lots of US-inspired crossover styles, hip-hop and rap are taking the younger generation by storm. Groups like Obsession, 100% Original, Freehole Negro (co-fronted by a woman) and Anónimo Consejo perform regularly and everyone comes out for the Cuban Rap Festival held in the Habana suburb of Alamar every August (see boxed text, above).

It's hard to categorize Interactivo, a collaboration of young, talented musicians led by pianist Robertico Carcassés. Part funk, jazz and rock, and very 'in the groove,' this band jams to the rafters; a guaranteed good time. Interactivo's bassist is Yusa, a young black woman whose eponymous debut album made it clear she's one of the most innovative musicians on the Cuban scene today.

In 2001 Welsh group the Manic Street Preachers became the first Western rock band to play live in Cuba. After the concert, which took place in Habana's Karl Marx theater, Castro commented that he considered their music to be 'louder than war.'

Meanwhile, back at base camp, US guitar virtuoso Ry Cooder inadvertently breathed new life into Cuban *son* music 10 years ago with his remarkable *Buena Vista Social Club* CD. Linking together half a dozen or so long-retired musical sages from the '40s and '50s, including 90-year-old Compay Segundo, (writer of Cuba's second-most played song *Chan Chan*) and the pianist Rúben González (ranked by Cooder as the greatest piano player he had ever heard), the unprepossessing American producer sat back in the studio and let his ragged clutch of old-age pensioners work their erstwhile magic. Over two million albums later and European and North American audiences are still enraptured by the sounds.

Environment

THE LAND

Measuring 1250km from east to west and from between 31km and 193km north to south, Cuba is the Caribbean's largest island with a total land area of 110,860 sq km. Shaped like an alligator and situated just south of the Tropic of Cancer the country is actually an archipelago made up of 4195 smaller islets and coral reefs, though the bulk of the territory is concentrated on the expansive Isla Grande and its 2200-sq-km smaller cousin, La Isla de la Juventud.

Formed by a volatile mixture of volcanic activity, plate tectonics and erosion, the landscape of Cuba is a lush and varied concoction of caves, mountains, plains, mogotes and strange flat-topped hills. The highest point, Pico Turquino (1972m) is situated in the east among the lofty triangular peaks of the Sierra Maestra while further west, in the no less majestic Escambray Mountains, ruffled hilltops and gushing waterfalls straddle the borders of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara and Sancti Spíritus Provinces. Rising like purple shadows in the far west, the 175km-long Cordillera de Guanguanico, is a more diminutive range that includes the protected Sierra del Rosario reserve and the distinctive pincushion hills of the Viñales Valley.

The hottest ever temperature recorded in Cuba was 38.6°C (101.5°F) at Guantánamo on August 7, 1969.

Lapped by the warm turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea in the south and the foamy, white chop of the Atlantic Ocean in the north, Cuba's 5746km of coastline shelters more than 300 natural beaches and features one of the largest tracts of coral reef in the world. Home to more than 900 reported species of fish and more than 410 varieties of sponge and coral, the country's unspoiled coastline is a marine wonderland that entices tourists from all over the globe.

The 7200m-deep Cayman Trench between Cuba and Jamaica forms the boundary of the North American and Caribbean plates. Tectonic movements have tilted the island over time, creating uplifted limestone cliffs along parts of the north coast and low mangrove swamps on the south. Over millions of years, Cuba's limestone bedrock has been eroded by underground rivers, creating interesting geological features including the 'haystack' hills of Viñales and more than 20,000 caves countrywide.

As a sprawling archipelago, Cuba boasts thousands of islands and keys (most uninhabited) in four major offshore groups: the Archipiélago de los Colorados, off northern Pinar del Río; the Archipiélago de Sabana-Camagüey (or Jardines del Rey), off northern Villa Clara and Ciego de Ávila; the Archipiélago de los Jardines de la Reina, off southern Ciego de Ávila; and the Archipiélago de los Canarreos, around Isla de la Juventud. Most visitors will experience one or more of these island idylls, as the majority of resorts, scuba diving and virgin beaches are found in these regions.

Being a narrow island, never measuring more than 200km north to south, means Cuba's capacity for large lakes and rivers is severely limited (preventing hydroelectricity). Cuba's longest river, the 343km-long Río Cauto, that flows from the Sierra Maestra in a rough loop north of Bayamo, is only navigable by small boats for 80km. To compensate, 632 *embalses* (reservoirs) or *presas* (dams), larger than 5km altogether, have been created for irrigation and water supply; these supplement the almost unlimited groundwater held in Cuba's limestone bedrock.

Lying in the Caribbean's main hurricane region, Cuba has been hit by some blinders in recent years including the two devastating 2005 storms: Dennis and Wilma.

Dennis, an unseasonable early arrival, ripped across the island's southern coast on July 7 from Santiago de Cuba to Cienfuegos causing US$1.4 billion of damage, destroying 120,000 homes and claiming 16 lives. Wilma, meanwhile, unleashed its full fury on Habana on October 22 causing extensive flooding to already dilapidated buildings along the famous Malecón seawall. Although more than 700,000 people were evacuated in anticipation of Wilma's arrival, Cuban rescue services still had to bale out hundreds of stranded householders using special amphibious vehicles.

WILDLIFE

Animals

While it isn't exactly the Serengeti, Cuba has its fair share of indigenous fauna and animal lovers won't be disappointed. Birds are probably the biggest draw card (see p31) and Cuba boasts more than 350 different varieties, 70 of which are indigenous. Head to the mangroves of Ciénaga de Zapata near the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) or the Península de Guanahacabibes in Pinar del Río for the best sightings of the blink-and-you'll-miss-it *zunzuncito* (bee hummingbird), the world's smallest bird and, at 6.5cm, not much longer than a toothpick. These areas are also home to the *tocororo* (Cuban trogon), Cuba's national bird, which sports the red, white and blue colors of the Cuban flag. Other popular bird species include flamingos (by the thousand), *cartacubas* (a type of Cuban bird), herons, spoonbills, parakeets and rarely-spotted Cuban Pygmy Owls.

Cuba's worst ever hurricane occurred on November 9, 1932 off the southern coast of Camagüey Province. It caused a 6m high tidal wave and left more than 3000 people dead.

Land mammals have been hunted almost to extinction with the largest indigenous survivor the friendly *jutía* (tree rat), a 4kg edible rodent that scavenges on isolated keys living in relevant harmony with armies of inquisitive iguanas. Other odd species include the *mariposa de cristal* (Cuban clearwing butterfly), one of only two clear-winged butterflies in the world; the rare *manjuarí* (Cuban alligator gar), an odd, ancient fish considered a living fossil; and the *polimita,* a unique land snail distinguished by its festive yellow, red and brown bands.

Reptiles are well represented in Cuba. Aside from crocodiles, iguanas and lizards, there are 15 species of snake, none of which are poisonous. Cuba's largest snake is the *majá,* a constrictor related to the anaconda that grows up to 4m long; it's nocturnal and doesn't usually mess with humans.

Cuba's marine life makes up for what it lacks in land fauna. The manatee, the world's only herbivorous aquatic mammal, is found in the Bahía de Taco and the Península de Zapata, and whale sharks frequent the María la Gorda area at Cuba's eastern tip from August to November. Four turtle species (leatherback, loggerhead, green and hawksbill) are found in Cuban waters and they nest annually in isolated keys or on the protected western beaches of the Guanahacabibes Peninsula.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Due to habitat loss and persistent hunting by humans many of Cuba's animals and birds are listed as endangered species. These include the Cuban crocodile, a fearsome reptile that has the smallest habitat of any crocodile, existing only in the Zapata swamps and in the Lanier swamps on Isla de la Juventud. Other vulnerable species include the *jutía*, which

was hunted mercilessly during the *período especial* (special period; Cuba's new economic reality post 1991) when hungry Cubans tracked them for their meat (they still do – in fact it is considered something of a delicacy); the Tree Boa, a native snake that lives in rapidly diminishing woodland areas; and the elusive *carpintero real* (royal carpenter woodpecker), spotted after a 40-year gap in the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt near Baracoa in the late 1980s, but not seen since.

The seriously endangered West Indian manatee, while protected from illegal hunting, continues to suffer from a variety of manmade threats, most notably from contact with boat propellers, suffocation caused by fishing nets and poisoning from residues pumped into rivers from sugar factories.

Cuba is home to both the world's smallest toad, the *ranita de Cuba* (Cuban tree toad; 1cm), and the world's smallest bird, the *zunzuncito* (bee hummingbird; 6.5cm).

Cuba has an ambiguous attitude toward the hunting of turtles. Hawksbill turtles are protected under the law, though a clause allows for up to 500 of them to be captured per year in certain areas (Camagüey and Isla de la Juventud). Travelers will occasionally encounter *tortuga* (turtle) on the menu in places such as Baracoa. You are advised not to partake as these turtles may have been caught illegally.

Plants

Cuba is synonymous with the palm tree and through songs, symbols, landscapes and legends the two are inextricably linked. The national tree is the *palma real* (royal palm), and it's central to the country's coat of arms and the Cristal beer logo. It's believed there are 20 million royal palms in Cuba and locals will tell you that wherever you stand on the island you'll always be within sight of one of them. Marching single file by the roadside or clumped on a hill, these majestic trees reach up to 40m tall and are easily identified by their lithesome trunk and green stalk at the top. There are also *cocotero* (coconut palms); *palma barrigona* (big belly palms), with their characteristic bulge; and the extremely rare *palma corcho* (cork palm). The latter is a link with the Cretaceous period (between 65 and 135 million years ago) and is cherished as a living fossil. You can see examples of it on the grounds of the Museo de Ciencias Naturales Sandalio de Noda (p196) and La Ermita (p207), both in Pinar del Río Province. All told, there are 90 palm tree types in Cuba.

Cuban tobacco and cigar exports net approximately CUC$200 million annually, but every year 6000 Cubans die from smoking-related illnesses.

Other important trees include mangroves, in particular the spiderlike mangroves that protect the Cuban shoreline from erosion and provide an important habitat for small fish and birds. Mangroves account for 26% of Cuban forests and cover almost 5% of the island's coast; Cuba ranks ninth in the world in terms of mangrove density, and the most extensive swamps are situated in the Ciénaga de Zapata.

The largest native pine forests grow on Isla de la Juventud (the former Isle of Pines), in western Pinar del Río, in eastern Holguín (or more specifically the Sierra Cristal Mountains) and in central Guantánamo. These forests are especially susceptible to fire damage, and pine reforestation has been a particular headache for the island's environmentalists.

Rain forests exist at higher altitudes – between approximately 500m and 1500m – in the Escambray, Sierra Maestra and Macizo de Sagua-Baracoa Mountains. Original rain forest species include ebony and mahogany, but today most reforestation is in eucalyptus, which is graceful and fragrant, but invasive.

Dotted liberally across the island, ferns, cacti and orchids contribute hundreds of species, many endemic, to Cuba's rich cornucopia of plant life. For the best concentrations check out the botanical gardens in Santiago de Cuba (p421) for ferns and cacti and Pinar del Río (p215) for orchids. Most orchids bloom from November to January, and one of the best places to see them is in the Sierra del Rosario reserve. The national flower is the graceful *mariposa* (butterfly jasmine); you'll know it by its white floppy petals and strong perfume.

Medicinal plants are widespread in Cuba due largely to a chronic shortage of prescription medicines (banned under the US embargo). Pharmacies are well stocked with effective tinctures such as aloe (for cough and congestion) and a bee by-product called *propólio,* used for everything from stomach amoebas to respiratory infections. On the home front, every Cuban patio has a pot of *orégano de la tierra* (Cuban oregano) growing and if you start getting a cold you'll be whipped up a wonder elixir made from the fat, flat leaves mixed with lime juice, honey and hot water.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE & BIOSPHERE RESERVE SITES

There are currently six Unesco Biosphere Reserves in Cuba and eight World Heritage sites. The most recent addition was the city of Cienfuegos, whose splendidly preserved neoclassical core was deservedly added to the list in July 2005.

The biosphere reserves are: the Reserva Sierra del Rosario (25,000 hectares; declared in 1984) and the Reserva Península de Guanahacabibes (101,500 hectares; 1987), both in Pinar del Río; Ciénaga de Zapata (628,171 hectares; 2001) in Matanzas; Buenavista (313,500 hectares; 2000) in parts of Villa Clara, Sancti Spíritus and Ciego de Ávila; Parque Baconao (84,600 hectares; 1987) in Santiago de Cuba; and the Reserva Cuchillas de Toa (127,500 hectares; 1987) in Guantánamo. Standards, services and administration of these reserves vary greatly. For example, the Península de Guanahacabibes is carefully protected, while Parque Baconao has small communities and many tourist installations within its boundaries.

Cuba boasts eight World Heritage sites: Habana Vieja, the historical core of Habana (declared in 1982); Trinidad and adjacent Valle de los Ingenios (1988) in Sancti Spíritus; Castillo de San Pedro del Morro (1997) and the First Coffee Plantations in the Southeast of Cuba (2000), both in Santiago de Cuba; Desembarco del Granma (1999) in Granma; Valle de Viñales (1999) in Pinar del Río; Alejandro de Humboldt (2001) in Guantánamo; and the Urban Historic Centre of Cienfuegos (2005) in Cienfuegos Province.

NATIONAL PARKS

In 1978 Cuba established the National Committee for the Protection and Conservation of Natural Resources and the Environment (Comarna). Attempting to reverse 400 years of deforestation and habitat destruction the body set about designating green belts and initiated ambitious reforestation campaigns. It is estimated that at the time of Columbus' arrival in 1492, 95% of Cuba was covered in virgin forest. By 1959 this area had been reduced to just 16%. The implementation of large-scale tree planting and the organization of large tracts of land into protected parks has seen this figure creep back up to 20%, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

In 1991 Cuba began its pioneering 'Urban Agricultural Program', a scheme whereby large tracts of urban wasteland are put to productive use to grow food organically for purely domestic consumption.

As of 2006, there were six national parks in Cuba: Parque Nacional Península de Guanahacabibes, Parque Nacional Viñales (both Pinar del Río); the Gran Parque Natural Montemar (Matanzas); Gran Parque Nacional Sierra Maestra and Parque Nacional Desembarco del Granma (Granma and Santiago de Cuba Provinces); and Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt (Guantánamo). Of these Desembarco del Granma and Parque Humboldt are also both Unesco World Heritage sites.

In Cuba the state protects national monuments and areas of outstanding natural beauty for the benefit of the population. Law 239 passed in

1959 proposed the creation of nine national parks and declared a desire to promote tourism. By the 1990s the plan had finally reached fruition. These days national conservation policies are directed by Comarna which acts as a coordinating body, overseeing 15 ministries and ensuring that current national and international environmental legislation is being carried out efficiently and effectively. This includes adherence to various international treaties such as the World Heritage Convention and the Unesco Man and Biosphere program.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Cuba's greatest environmental problems are aggravated by an economy struggling to survive. As the country pins its hopes on tourism to save the financial day, a schizophrenic environmental policy has evolved, cutting right to the heart of the dilemma: how can a developing nation provide for its people *and* maintain high (or at least minimal) ecological standards?

One disaster in this struggle, most experts agree, was the 2km-long stone *pedraplén* (causeway) constructed to link offshore Cayo Sabinal with mainland Camagüey. This massive project involved piling boulders in the sea and laying a road on top, which interrupted water currents and caused irreparable damage to bird and marine habitats. Other longer causeways were built connecting Los Jardines del Rey to Ciego de Ávila (27km long; p317) and Cayo Santa María to Villa Clara (a 48km-long monster; p283). The full extent of the ecological damage wreaked by these causeways won't be known for another decade at least.

Building new roads and airports, package tourism that shuttles large groups of people into sensitive habitats and the frenzied construction of giant resorts on virgin beaches exacerbates the clash between human activity and environmental protection. The grossly shrunken extents of the Reserva Ecológica Varahicacos in Varadero due to encroaching resorts is just one example. Dolphins rounded up as entertainers has rankled activists as well. Overfishing (including turtles and lobster for tourist consumption), agricultural runoff, industrial pollution and inadequate sewage treatment have contributed to the decay of coral reefs, and diseases such as yellow band, black band and nuisance algae have begun to appear.

As soon as you arrive in Habana or Santiago de Cuba you'll realize that air pollution is a problem. Airborne particles, old cars belching black smoke and by-products from burning garbage are some of the culprits. Cement factories, sugar refineries and other heavy industry take their toll. The nickel mines engulfing Moa serve as stark examples of industrial concerns taking precedence: this is some of the prettiest landscape in Cuba, made a barren wasteland of lunar proportions.

On the bright side is the enthusiasm the government has shown for reforestation and protecting natural areas – there are several projects on the drawing board – and its willingness to confront mistakes from the past. Habana Harbor, once Latin America's most polluted, has been undergoing a massive clean-up project, as has the Río Almendares, which cuts through the heart of the city. Both programs are beginning to show positive results. Sulfur emissions from oil wells near Varadero have been reduced and environmental regulations for developments are now enforced by the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment. Fishing regulations, as local fisherman will tell you, have become increasingly strict. Striking the balance between Cuba's immediate needs and the future of its environment is one of the revolution's increasingly pressing challenges.

The Cuban government planted more than three billion trees in a reforestation program known as Plan Manatí. Though half of those trees perished, another reforestation program aims to recover a million hectares with new trees by 2015.

PROTECTED AREAS

Park	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit	Page
Parque Nacional Península de Guanahacabibes	mangrove/beach: whale sharks, marine turtles, rare birds	scuba diving, remote, hiking, birding	Jun-Oct for nesting turtles, few visitors	p202
Parque Nacional Viñales	verdant valley: caves, pincushion hills, tobacco fields, visitors center	spelunking, hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing	year-round	p209
Gran Parque Natural Montemar	wetland: mangroves, 190 bird species, manatees, crocodile breeding, Taíno village replica	birding, boat tours, fishing	Nov-Apr	p252
Gran Parque Nacional Sierra Maestra	mountains: Cuban Revolution headquarters, cloud forest, high peaks, views, museum	trekking, camping	Oct-May dry season	p380 & p426
Parque Nacional Desembarco del Granma	forests/beach: rain forest, reef, trails, *Granma* replica,cacti, lighthouse, caves, petroglyphs	hiking, spelunking, swimming, fishing	Sep-Jun	p387
Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt	mangroves/forest: well-protected bayside setting, on-site specialists, visitors center, manatees, trails	boat tours, birding, hiking	year-round	p446

Food & Drink

Let's face it, you don't come to Cuba for the food. But while Cuban cuisine is often portrayed as bad, boring or both, the truth is Cuban cooks are extraordinarily creative, and home cooking, whether in someone's home or paladar (privately owned restaurant), is plentiful and delicious – and grease-laden: anyone with high cholesterol might consider vacationing elsewhere.

Resort food is a different story. If you're headed to an all-inclusive, there will be tomatoes in August and cheese year-round. Eating options shrink astronomically as soon as you venture outside the home, paladar or resort and you'll probably find yourself going hungry at least once during your travels. To avoid this fate, see below.

STAPLES & SPECIALTIES

Known as *comida criolla* (Creole food), Cuban meals always feature *congrí* (rice flecked with black beans), fried plantains (green bananas) and salad. In the Oriente it's called *moros y cristianos* (literally 'Moors and Christians') or *congrí oriental* if the beans are red. Salad is a euphemism for 'whatever raw thing is available,' mostly tomato or cucumber slices and/or shredded cabbage.

Protein means pork and you'll become well acquainted with *lomo ahumado* (aromatic smoked loin), *chuletas* (thin juicy filet) and fricassee with peppers and onions. *Filete Uruguayo* is a breaded, deep-fried cutlet stuffed with ham and cheese.

STAYING FED

In Cuba, someone who is always eating is called a *jamaliche* or *camelón* but, unless you're staying at an all-inclusive resort, there's going to be hours, days – even whole weeks – when you're going to wish you'd stuffed a jar of peanut butter into your rucksack. Here's some advice to keep all you *jamaliches* out there fed:

- Always carry Cuban pesos (which can be easily changed in Cadeca banks). Pesos are good for ice cream, peanuts, egg sandwiches, fruit shakes, bread, fruits, vegetables and above all peso pizza.
- Keep a spare plastic bag (a rarity in Cuba) and fill it up at bakeries and fruit markets.
- Keep an eye out for 24-hour peso stalls which usually congregate around hospitals.
- If you are fortunate enough to stumble upon an as-much-as-you-can-eat buffet, wrap up your leftovers in a napkin and smuggle it out for later.
- Cyclists, exercise freaks or any other type of *jamaliche* should come prepared with power bars, nuts, dried fruit and other lightweight, high-protein snacks.
- Be willing to eat fried food, including unidentifiable tidbits sold on the street.
- Stock up on cookies and biscuits whenever you see a grocery store.
- Look for good yogurt in gas stations and cafeterías (especially the El Rápido chain).
- Rent a room with kitchen privileges, then hit the *agropecuario* (vegetable market) and have a dinner party.
- Become a Cuban and never waste *anything*.
- Don't forget the peanut butter!

It will seem like Cuban chickens are born already fried and any *pescado* (fish) has made for distant waters. Though you'll come across *pargo* (red snapper) occasionally, you're more likely to see lobster or shrimp *ajillo* (sautéed in oil and garlic) or *enchilado* (in tomato sauce). *Ostiones* (small oysters served with tomato sauce and lime juice) are also popular. Cow production is controlled by the Cuban government so beef products such as steak are sold only in state-run restaurants. Fast-food places sell tasty hamburgers, though there's probably more ham than burger in there.

Yuca (cassava) and *calabaza* (pumpkinlike squash) are served with an insanely addictive sauce called *mojo* made from oil, garlic and bitter orange. Green beans, beets and avocados (June to August) are likely to cross your lips too. However, you're likely to see more vegetables at the market than on your plate.

Very few restaurants do breakfast (though pastries are sold at chains like Pain de Paris and Doña Neli), so if this is an important meal for you, stock up at a hotel buffet or arrange for your casa particular to provide it. Most casas do huge, hearty breakfasts of eggs, toast, fresh juice, coffee and piles of fruit for CUC$2 to CUC$3.

Cuba is famous for its mojitos and, if you can't stand another mound of rice and beans, why not opt for a liquid supper of these smooth cocktails made from rum, mint, sugar, seltzer and fresh lime juice?

The Cuban sandwich is a classic Cuban export that you're more likely to find in Miami than Habana. It's a grilled combination of sliced roast pork, Serrano ham and thinly cut swiss cheese garnished with pickles and yellow mustard.

Desserts

At last count there were 14 brands of *helado* (ice cream) and Cubans are aficionados (eg Alondra's strawberry tastes fake, while Nevada's hazelnut is creamy). Coppelia's ice cream is legendary, ridiculously cheap tubs of other brands (440g for CUC$1) can be procured almost everywhere, and even the machine-dispensed peso stuff ain't half bad. Walk down any Cuban street at any time of the day or night and you'll see somebody coming to grips with a huge tub of Nestlés or enjoying a fast-melting cornet. See the boxed text Making Cents of Coppelia (p131).

Flan is baked custard with a caramel glaze served in individual portions. Cubans also make pumpkin and coconut flan of Spanish origin. Huge sickly sweet cakes are wheeled out at the smallest excuse – and usually transported around the town on a wobbling bicycle first. Habana and a couple of the larger cities also have some good patisseries. The standard (and only) dessert in all cheap restaurants and Islazul hotels is the incongruous *mermalada con queso* (tinned jam with a slice of stale cheese). It's as vile as it sounds!

During the worst of the *período especial* (1990–95), every adult Cuban lost between 2.25kg and 4.5kg due to food shortages.

DRINKS

Alcoholic Drinks

In Cuba it's all about the *ron* (rum). Minty mojitos, Cuba *libres* (rum and Coke), daiquirís, *Cubanitos* (rum and tomato juice), straight up or on the rocks, it's served all ways. Havana Club is Cuba's most famous brand, with Silver Dry (the cheapest) and three-year-old Carta Blanca used for mixed drinks, while five-year-old Carta de Oro and seven-year-old Añejo are best enjoyed in a highball. Cuba's finest rum is Matusalem Añejo Superior, brewed in Santiago de Cuba since 1872. Other top brands include Varadero, Caribbean Club and Caney (made at the old Bacardí factory in Santiago de Cuba, though the name Bacardí is anathema as the exiled family decided to sue the Cuban government under US embargo laws). Sharing your bottle is all you need to know about Cuban party etiquette.

Cuba's star ingredient is lobster and no one is better qualified to talk about it than Gilberto Smith Duquesne, chairman of the Cuban Culinary Association. Check out his classic book *El Rey Langosta* with 60 fabulous recipes.

The drink made from fermented cane is called *aguardiente* (fire water) and a few shots will knock you on your ass. In bodegas (stores distributing ration-card products) it's sold as *ron a granel* for 20 pesos (equivalent to US$0.77 per 1500ml) – bring an empty bottle. Local nicknames for this hooch include 'drop her drawers' and 'train spark.' Popular bottled brands are Santero and El Niño. Cubans also make fruit wines from mango, pineapple or raisins. Big city stores usually carry a limited selection of Spanish, Chilean and Cuban wines. Top beer brands include Mayabe (3.8% alcohol) and Hatuey (5.4%). These are like microbreweries though, and you'll spend most of your time drinking super light Cristal (4.9%) or Bucanero (5.4%). Imported beers include Lagarto, Bavaria and Heineken.

Cuban cooking boring? Look out for the book *Three Guys from Miami Cook Cuban* by Glenn M Lindgren, Raúl Musibay and Jorge Castillo and you'll soon discover otherwise.

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Cuban coffee *(cafécito* or *café cubano)* is strong, black and super sweet. Unless you say otherwise it will come served in a small cup with sugar already added. A morning treat is a big cup of *café con leche* (a mixture of strong coffee and hot milk) or *leche con chocolate* (sickly sweet hot chocolate). *Café americano* is diluted Cuban coffee and only worth mentioning so you can avoid it. There isn't much of a tea *(té)* culture in Cuba, but you can always get a pot of hot water at hotels or restaurants. Tea bags are sold in stores that sell items in Convertibles.

Any place serving mojitos can whip up a refreshing *limonada* (limeade). Pure *jugo* (fruit juice), *refresco* (instant powdered drink) and *batidos* (fruit milkshakes) are sold in street stalls for a few pesos. Note that they are made with water and/or ice, so if you have a sensitive stomach you might take a pass.

Guarapo is a popular sugarcane juice (see p363). *Prú* is a special nonalcoholic brew from the Oriente made from spices, fermented *yuca* (cassava) and secret ingredients *prú*-meisters won't divulge.

Tap water quality is variable and many Cubans have gory amoebic tales, including giardia. To be safe you can drink *agua natural* (bottled water), but that gets expensive over longer trips. You can also boil it (the local method) or buy bottled chlorine drops called Gotica. Available in most stores that sell products in Convertibles for CUC$1.25, one drop makes 3L of drinkable water; this works well in the provinces, but in Habana it's better to boil or buy bottled water. Don't touch the water in Santiago, even to brush your teeth. It's famously dirty – and brown!

Cuban paladares are only supposed to serve 12 covers at any one time. They are also barred from serving lobster and beef, both of which are considered to be government monopolies.

CELEBRATIONS

New Year's Eve, birthdays, family reunions: whatever the reason, big events are celebrated with *lechón asado* (roast pork). As much about the process and camaraderie as the food, a pig roast is a communal effort where the jokes fly, the rum flows and dancing or *dominó* somehow figures in. Once the pig is killed, cleaned and seasoned, it's slowly pit-roasted over a charcoal fire. Traditional sides include *yuca con mojo, congrí* and salad. Stall after stall peddles freshly carved *lechón asado,* sliced down the middle and splayed on platters, during Holguín's Carnaval (see p354), and many families celebrate Christmas Eve *(Noche Buena)* with this local favorite.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

State-Run Restaurants

Restaurant opening hours are generally 11am to 11pm daily although staff sometimes drift off for lunch unannounced, or will be too busy engaged in a stocktake to serve you right away. Government or state-run restaurants are either in pesos or Convertibles. Peso restaurants are notorious for handing you a nine-page menu (in Spanish), when the only thing available is fried chicken. Obviously you're supposed to pick up this information via telepathy because you'll sit for half an hour or more before learning this while the waitress falls asleep, wakes up, takes a phone call, files her nails wipes the bar with a dirty cloth and fall asleep again. But it's not all pain and stomachache. Some peso restaurants are quite good; all are absurdly cheap and they're often your only option off the tourist circuit, so don't discount them altogether (Doña Yulla is a nationwide chain to look out for). Sometimes workers in peso restaurants either won't show you the menu in an effort to overcharge you, or they will charge Convertibles at a one-to-one ratio – making the food ridiculously overpriced. Verify *before* you order that you're looking at peso prices (meals will be in the 15- to 25-peso range). Some peso restaurants have one menu in Convertibles at a reasonable rate and another in pesos.

Moros y cristianos (Moors and Christians) is a typical Cuban meal of white rice cooked with black beans. *Congrí oriental* is rice with red beans sometimes mixed in with crispy pork slices.

Restaurants that sell food in Convertibles are generally more reliable, but this isn't capitalism: just because you're paying more doesn't necessarily mean better service. In fact, after a week or two roaming the streets of Cuba's untouristed provincial towns in search of a decent meal you'll quickly realize that Cuban restaurants are the Achilles heel of the socialist revolution. Food is often limp and unappetizing and discourses with bored and disinterested waiters worthy of something out of a Monty Python sketch ('we can't do you a cheese sandwich, but we can do you a cheese and ham sandwich'). There are a few highlights in an otherwise dull field. The Palmares group runs a wide variety of excellent restaurants countrywide from a small shabby hut on Maguana beach, Baracoa to the *New York Times*–lauded El Aljibe in Miramar, Habana. Another safe, if uninspiring certainty is El Rápido, the Cuban version of McDonald's, which offers a generic menu of microwave pizzas, hot dogs, sandwiches and – sometimes – excellent yogurt. Cuba would do well to open more La Vicarias, where the service is uniformly good, the prices fair and the food palatable. Habana is, of course, a different ballpark, with many state-run restaurants in the Old Town and Miramar of excellent quality. All state-run restaurant employees earn the standard CUC$8 to CUC$13 a month, so tips are highly appreciated (see p80).

Nitza Villapol, Cuban cook and TV personality, carried on rustling up resourceful recipes throughout the darkest days of the *período especial*. Indeed, legend has it that her show was once canceled after she tried to present an innovative new menu alternative called 'black bean dessert.'

Paladares

The Cuban dining scene brightened considerably with the advent of paladares (private restaurants) in 1995. Legally, paladares can only have 12 seats and cannot serve beef, lobster or shrimp. In practice, however, paladares routinely offer forbidden foods and have doors leading from the kitchen to back rooms or patios where they can accommodate far more than 12 diners.

Because these restaurants are in private residences (and the owners pay a stiff monthly tax for the privilege), each atmosphere is different, from romantic garden dining to windowless rooms with the air-con set to 'polar cap.' Some paladares have written menus, while others don't; some take pesos, but most want Convertibles. If there's a menu, check how much beer costs, and if it's over CUC$10 (Convertibles and pesos use the same symbol!) you can assume the menu is in pesos, which always works out cheaper. In monetary terms, a filling meal costs anywhere between CUC$4 and CUC$12. Always check prices beforehand, as some paladares are rip-offs. If a paladar doesn't have a written menu with prices listed, it's a negative sign. Many paladares have two or three menus all listing the same dishes but with different prices, depending on

how much they think you might be willing to pay (often directly related to your Spanish abilities) and whether a commission must be paid to the *jinetero* who led you there. These touts will add a few Convertibles to every meal.

A number of paladares are listed in this book, but beware – the situation is changing fast and many places close down when owners emigrate or can't pay their taxes. Furthermore, the government has become increasingly strict with inspections and licencing, making it more difficult than ever to maintain a paladar. Some large cities such as Cienfuegos have only one or two legal paladares. Of course, there's always someone willing to cook meals clandestinely (ie nontax paying), but this can incur heavy fines, so discretion is advised.

To allow readers to quickly distinguish between private and state-run restaurants, all privately operated eateries are listed as paladares. Whenever this book refers to a 'restaurant,' it means it's a government-operated place.

When cooked 'Habana style,' mincemeat should be well-seasoned with garlic, laurel, onion, paprika, tomato, oregano, pepper, olives and raisins, and arranged with a fried egg on top.

Quick Eats

Like all private industry, *cafeterías* (street stalls) are government regulated so – although they might look a bit grungy – hygiene isn't usually a problem. Cuban street pizza, with its pungent cheese and occasional glob of tomato, is surprisingly good and became the new national dish during the *período especial.* Good standards on the street dining scene include *batidos, asado* (roasted) or breaded pork cutlet sandwiches, fruit cocktail and ice cream. There's also a whole category of *pan con…* (bread with…) – whatever can be put inside bread, from tortilla (tasty eggs) to *pasta* (an icky mayonnaise substance).

Keep an eye out for stalls and windows with *comida criolla* signs. These places sell *cajitas* (literally 'little boxes'): full meals of salad, baked vegetables, *congrí* and pork cutlets that are sold in little take-away boxes with a cardboard spoon cutout on the lid for CUC$1.

All street food is sold in pesos. For more information see the boxed text (p76).

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

In a land of rationing and food shortages, strict vegetarians (ie no lard, no meat bullion, no fish) will have a hard time. Cubans don't really understand vegetarianism and, when they do (or when they *say* they do), it can be summarized rather adroitly in one key word: omelette – or, at a stretch, scrambled eggs. The other problem is preparation. Even if your omelette has no meat in it, don't assume that it has been prepared in a manner that is in any way sympathetic to vegetarian requirements. Indeed, Cubans often interpret vegetarianism as 'no meat chunks in the soup.' The solution: pick out the offending items out just before serving. Thankfully change is on the horizon. The opening of a handful of new vegetarian restaurants in Habana (see p128) has coincided with a nationwide educational campaign about the health benefits of a vegetarian diet. Furthermore, cooks in casas particulares who may already have had experience cooking meatless dishes for other travelers are usually more than happy to accommodate vegetarians; just ask.

Vegans have little choice but to cook for themselves. Many people rent rooms with kitchen privileges or entire self-sufficient apartments; this book makes a conscious effort to provide information about cooking options in casas particulares. Other options for serious vegans and/or vegetarians:

Agropecuarios Vegetable markets; also sell rice, beans, fruit (for a list of Habana's best markets, see p130).
Organopónicos Organic vegetable markets.
Proteina vegetal Dried soy protein (sold in bodegas).
Spirulina Spirulina powder (an aquatic plant offering high protein and vitamins).
Yogurt de soya Soy yogurt (sold in bodegas; regular yogurt is sold in stores that sell goods in Convertibles).

TIPPING & RESERVATIONS

Remembering to tip is important in Cuba. In a country where the doctors work as waiters and the waiters double up as musicians serenading mojito-sipping tourists as they tuck tentatively into *moros y cristianos* (rice and beans), a couple of Convertibles left in the bread basket at the end of the meal can effectively make or break a person's week. It is important to bear in mind that most of these people earn their salaries in *moneda nacional* (pesos), which works out to the equivalent of US$10 to US$25 a month. Access to hard currency is necessary to make up the shortfall. However mediocre your food, a Convertible or two isn't just a show of appreciation; it's a vital contribution to the local economy.

In Cuba, a 10% tip is usually sufficient, with CUC$1 being the appropriate minimum in a restaurant that accepts Convertibles. Tipping in peso restaurants is not compulsory, but is greatly appreciated. Leaving 10 pesos or CUC$0.50 in Convertible peso change is a generous tip.

Unless you're in a large group or want to eat at one of the chic, trendy paladares (eg La Guarida in Habana), there's no need for a reservation.

In Cuba the taste of the orangey-red *mamey* fruit is loved by almost everybody. So much so, that the word *mamey* has entered the Cuban vocabulary as an oft-used superlative. To describe a woman as *'mamey'* is to pay her the ultimate compliment.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Managing a menu in Spanish, making special requests or maneuvering a meal in pesos – your eating options will expand if you can speak the language. For pronunciation guidelines see p486.

Useful Phrases

Is there food?	
¿Hay comida?	ai ko·*mee*·da
What kind of food is there?	
¿Qué comida hay?	ke ko·*mee*·da ai
Table for ..., please.	
Una mesa para ..., por favor.	*oo*·na *me*·sa *pa*·ra ... por fa·*vor*
Can I see the menu please?	
¿Puedo ver la carta, por favor?	*pwe*·do ver la *kar*·ta, por fa·*vor*
This menu is in pesos, right?	
¿Esta carta está en moneda nacional, verdad?	esta *kar*·ta es·*ta* en mo·*ne*·da na·syo·*nal* ver·*da*
Do you have a menu in English?	
¿Tienen una carta en inglés?	*tye*·nen oon·a *kar*·ta en een·*gles*
What is today's special?	
¿Cuál es el plato del día?	kwal es el *pla*·to del *dee*·a
I'll try what she's/he's having.	
Probaré lo que ella/él está comiendo.	pro·*ba*·ray lo ke *e*·lya/el es·*ta* ko·*myen*·do
I'd like the set lunch.	
Quisiera el almuerzo, por favor.	kee·*sye*·ra el al·*mwer*·so, por fa·*vor*
What's in that dish?	
¿De qué es ese plato?	de ke es *es*·e *pla*·to
Thank you, that was delicious.	
Muchas gracias, estaba buenísimo.	*moo*·chas *gra*·syas es·*ta*·ba bwe·*nee*·see·mo
The bill, please.	
La cuenta, por favor.	la *kwen*·ta por fa·*vor*

I'm a vegetarian.
Soy vegetariano/a. soy ve·khe·ta·*rya*·no/a
Do you have any vegetarian dishes?
¿Tienen algún plato vegetariano? *tye*·nen al·*goon pla*·to ve·khe·ta·*rya*·no
I'm allergic to ...
Tengo alergía a ... *ten*·go a·lair·*jee*·ya a

Menu Decoder

ajiaco	a·*khya*·ko	a 'kitchen sink' stew that has potatoes, squash, *malanga*,(root vegetable similar to taro); plantains, corn, meat, tomato paste, spices, old beer, lemon juice and whatever else is around
arroz con pollo	a·*ros* kon *po*·lyo	rice and bits of chicken mixed together
bocadito	bo·ka·*dee*·to	sandwich on round bread
café cortado	ka·*fe* kor·*ta*·do	espresso with a shot of milk
cajita	ka·*khee*·ta	take-out meal that comes in a small box
caldosa	kal·*do*·sa	similar to *ajiaco*; literally 'stew'
chicharitas/ mariquitas	chee·cha·*ree*·tas/ ma·ree·*kee*·tas	plantain (green banana) chips; sometimes made from potatoes or *malanga*
chicharrones	chee·cha·*ro*·nes	fried pork rinds
crema de queso	*kre*·ma de *ke*·so	heavy cheese soup that has as much flour as cheese; variations include *crema Aurora* and *crema Virginia*
entremes	en·tre·*mes*	finger food or appetizer, usually with ham and cheese slices and green olives; sometimes quite large servings
filete Canciller	fi·*le*·te kan·*see*·lyer	breaded fish stuffed with ham and cheese
filete Monte Toro	fi·*le*·te *mon*·te *to*·ro	delicately breaded fish filet, fried and stuffed with cheese
filete Uruguayo	fi·*le*·te oo·ro·*gwai*·yo	fried, breaded pork cutlet stuffed with ham and cheese
Gordon Bleu	*gor*·don bloo	chicken stuffed with ham and cheese; charming anthropomorphism of cordon bleu
guarnición	gwar·nee·*syon*	side dish
hígado a la italiana	*ee*·ga·do a la ee·tal·*ya*·na	liver sautéed in tomato sauce, with peppers and onions
lomo ahumado	*lo*·mo a·oo·*ma*·do	smoked pork loin
potaje	po·*ta*·khe	subtly spiced black beans with pork bones or chunks, served in its own soupy juices
ropa vieja	*ro*·pa *vye*·kha	traditional Cuban dish of mounds of shredded beef livened with tomatoes and onions; only available in state-run restaurants
servicio incluído	ser·*vee*·syo een·kloo·*ee*·do	tip included
table 1, 2 etc	*ta*·ble *oo*·no dos etc	different meal *offers* (distinguished by the numbers) that include a main dish, salad, side and dessert, usually with smaller portions
tamal en cazuela	ta·*mal* en ka·*swe*·la	ground fresh corn, boiled with meat and spices and served in a pot; called *tamales* when wrapped in corn husks
tostones	tos·*to*·nes	fried plantain patties
vegetales Macedonias	ve·khe·*ta*·les ma·se·*don*·yas	a mix of carrots and green beans boiled to death or canned
vianda	vee·*an*·dah	any root vegetable (potato, yuca, *malanga,* plantain etc). This appears on many menus as *vianda frita*.

Food Glossary

FRUTAS (FRUITS)

fruta bomba	*froo*·ta *bom*·ba	papaya
guayaba	gwa·*ya*·ba	guava
mamey	ma·*me*	brown-skinned fruit with orange flesh
melón	me·*lon*	watermelon
naranja (agria)	na·*ran*·kha (a·*gree*·a)	orange (bitter)
piña	*pee*·nya	pineapple
plátano fruta	*pla*·ta·no froo·ta	banana
toronja	*to*·*ron*·*kha*	grapefruit
zapote	sa·*po*·te	brown-skinned fruit with orange flesh

VERDURAS (VEGETABLES)

berenjena	be·*ren*·kha	eggplant
boniato	bo·*nya*·to	sweet potato
calabaza	ka·la·*ba*·sa	squash
champiñon	cham·*pee*·nyon	mushroom
espinaca	es·pee·*na*·ka	spinach
maíz	mai·*ees*	corn
malanga	ma·*lan*·ga	root vegetable similar to taro
papa	*pa*·pa	potato
plátano verde	*pla*·ta·no *ver*·de	green plantain (savory)
plátano maduro	*pla*·ta·no ma·*doo*·ro	green plantain (sweet)

ENSALADA (SALAD)

aguacate	a·gwa·*ka*·te	avocado
aliño	a·*lee*·nyo	oil and vinegar dressing/carafes
berro	*be*·ro	watercress
col	kol	cabbage
ensalada de estación	en·sa·*la*·da de es·ta·*syon*	seasonal salad
ensalada mixta	en·sa·*la*·da *meeks*·ta	mixed salad; usually tomatoes, cucumbers and cabbage/ lettuce
habichuela	a·bee·*chwe*·la	green beans
lechuga	le·*choo*·ga	lettuce
pepino	pe·*pee*·no	cucumber
remolacha	re·mo·*la*·cha	beets
zanahoria	sa·na·*o*·rya	carrot

CARNE (MEAT)

cerdo	*ser*·do	pork
chorizo	cho·*ree*·so	sausage
jamón	kha·*mon*	ham
lechón asado	le·*chon* a·*sa*·do	roast pork
picadillo	pee·ka·*dee*·lyo	ground beef
pollo frito	*po*·lyo *free*·to	fried chicken
puerco	*pwer*·ko	pork

PESCADO & MARISCOS (FISH & SHELLFISH)

calamar	ka·*la*·mar	squid
camarones	ka·ma·*ro*·nes	shrimp
cangrejo	kan·*gre*·kho	crab
langosta	lan·*gos*·ta	lobster
mariscos	ma·*rees*·kos	shellfish
ostiones	os·*tyo*·nes	oysters
pargo	*par*·go	red snapper

POSTRES (DESSERTS)

arroz con leche	a·*ros* kon *le*·che	rice and milk pudding
flan	flan	baked custard with caramel glaze
helado (en pote)	e·*la*·do (en po·te)	ice cream (cup)
jimagua	khee·*ma*·gwa	two scoops of ice cream
lolita	lo·*lee*·ta	flan à la mode
natilla	na·*tee*·lya	sinful custard made almost entirely of egg yolks
pudín	poo·*deen*	bread pudding
tres gracias	tres *gra*·syas	three scoops of ice cream

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

maní en grano	ma·*nee* en *gra*·no	peanut brittle
maní molido	ma·*nee* mo·*lee*·do	peanut paste (similar to peanut butter)
pan con tortilla	pan kon tor·*tee*·lya	bread with egg
pasta/croqueta	pas·ta/kro·*ke*·ta	mayonnaise/fritter
tortica	tor·*tee*·ka	butter cookie (often made with lard)

TÉCNICAS (COOKING TECHNIQUES)

a la plancha	a la *plan*·cha	cooked in a skillet
asado	a·*sa*·do	roasted
empanizado	em·pa·nee·*sa*·do	breaded
parrillada/grille	pa·ree·*lya*·da/*gree*·lye	on the grill
sofrito	so·*free*·to	Cuban seasoning made by sautéing onions, garlic and sweet peppers