

La Habana



There is nowhere in the world like Habana. From the crumbling apartment buildings of Centro Habana to the grandiose colonial edifices of the Habana Vieja (Old Habana), the Caribbean's largest and most vivacious city bewitches and beguiles, confounds and frustrates. Federico Lorca eulogized it; Hemingway made it his permanent home; British novelist Graham Greene fell unashamedly for its dark and seedy nocturnal habitats. They weren't the only converts. Over a period of five centuries Habana has seduced everyone from buccaneering Caribbean pirates, to foreign tourists in Che Guevara T-shirts.

The essence of the city's unique atmosphere is hard to pin down. Habana works its magic slowly, gradually crawling underneath your skin with an indefatigable combination of music, passion, serendipity and soul. But Habana's greatest attraction is its gritty authenticity. This is no touched-up tourist complex or hastily made-over museum piece. The ration shops here are *real* ration shops and the Jurassic Pontiacs that ply the traffic-choked streets around Parque de la Fraternidad aren't lovingly restored collector's items – they're an economic necessity.

The opportunities to lose yourself in the melee are endless. For architectural buffs there's the baroque Gran Teatro or the art-deco Edificio Bacardí building. For music fiends there's rumba and salsa, *trova* (poetic singing/songwriting) and *son* (Cuba's popular music). Even hardcore Cuba cynics will have trouble resisting the sensuous pleasures of vibrant Vedado, or the sun-streaked colonnades of the Malecón at dusk.

HIGHLIGHTS

■ Architecture

Explore the glittering colonial city of Habana Vieja (p93)

■ The Malecón

Take in the dramatic sweep of Habana at sunset (p110)

■ The Music

Salsa at La Casa de la Música (p135) and rumba at the Callejón de Hamel (p115)

■ Fine Dining

Uncover the nuances of Cuban cooking at Paladar La Guarida (p125), La Cocina de Lilliam (p125), and El Aljibe (p125)

■ The Museums

Dig deep into Cuban history and culture at the Museo de la Revolución (p102) and the Museo de la Ciudad (p96)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 7

■ POPULATION: 2.2 MILLION

■ AREA: 740 SQ KM

Visitors spend the bulk of their time in Habana Vieja, Centro Habana and Vedado. Important streets here include: Obispo, a pedestrian mall cutting through the center of Habana Vieja; Paseo de Martí (aka Paseo del Prado or just 'Prado'), an elegant 19th-century promenade in Centro Habana; Av de Italia (aka Galiano), Centro Habana's main shopping street for Cubans; Malecón, Habana's broad coastal boulevard; and Calle 23 (aka La Rampa), the heart of Vedado's commercial district.

Confusingly, many main avenues around Habana have two names in everyday use – a new name that appears on street signs and in this book, and an old name overwhelmingly preferred by locals. See the boxed text to sort it all out (below).

Maps

Your best guide to the old city is *La Habana Vieja Guía Turística*, published by the Instituto Cubano de Geodesia y Cartografía (GeoCuba). It contains 35 maps of the old town, along with 222 pages of refer-

ences and helpful descriptions in Spanish, English, French and German. It is available at some hotel shops.

GeoCuba also publishes *Ciudad de la Habana Mapa Turístico*, which covers all 15 municipalities in detail, including good scale street maps of the central city and Playas del Este. The fold-out *Guía de Carreteras*, with countrywide and Habana city maps, is very useful if you'll also be exploring other provinces. Highway signs around Habana are poor to nonexistent, and these maps are almost essential for drivers. **Infotur** (Map p94; ☎ 33 33 33; Obispo btwn Bernaza & Villegas) can provide you with a selection of good city maps.

DOWNTOWN HABANA

For simplicity's sake downtown Habana can be split into three main component parts: Habana Vieja, Centro Habana and Vedado, which between them contain the bulk of the tourist sights. Centrally-located Habana Vieja is the city's atmospheric historical masterpiece; Centro Habana, to the west, provides an eye-opening look at the real-life Cuba in close-up, while the more majestic Vedado is the once-notorious Mafia-run district replete with hotels, restaurants and a pulsating nightlife.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librería Alma Mater (Map pp106-7; ☎ 870-2060; cnr San Lázaro & Calle L, Vedado) Next to the university steps. Has textbooks and poetry.

Librería Centenario del Apóstol (Map pp106-7; ☎ 870-7220; Calle 25 No 164, Vedado; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Great assortment of used books.

Librería Grijalbo Mondadovi (Map p94; Palacio del Segundo Cabo, O'Reilly No 4, Plaza de Armas, Habana Vieja; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Fantastic mix of magazines, guidebooks, reference, politics and art imprints in English and Spanish.

Librería La Internacional (Map p94; ☎ 861-3283; Obispo No 526, Habana Vieja; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) Good selection of guides, photo books and Cuban literature in English; next door is Librería Cervantes, an antiquarian bookseller.

Librería Luis Rogelio Noguerras (Map p100; ☎ 863-8101; Av de Italia No 467 btwn Barcelona & San Martín, Centro Habana) Literary magazines and Cuban literature in Spanish.

HABANA STREET NAMES

Old name	New name
Zulueta	Agramonte
Someruelos	Aponte
Av del Puerto	Av Carlos Manuel de Céspedes
Egido & Monserrate	Av de Bélgica
Vives	Av de España
Galiano	Av de Italia
Av de Rancho Boyeros (Boyeros)	Av de la Independencia
Monserrate	Av de las Misiones
Cristina	Av de México
Carlos III (Tercera)	Av Salvador Allende
Reina	Av Simón Bolívar
Teniente Rey	Brasil
La Rampa	Calle 23
Av de los Presidentes	Calle G
Cárcel	Capdevila
Estrella	Enrique Barnet
Paula	Leonor Pérez
Av de Maceo	Malecón
Monte	Máximo Gómez
Belascoain	Padre Varela
Paseo del Prado	Paseo de Martí
San José	San Martín

Librería Rayuela (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 27 06; Casa de las Américas, cnr Calles 3 & G, Vedado; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) Terrific for contemporary literature, compact discs; some guidebooks.

Moderna Poesía (Map p94; ☎ 861-6640; Obispo 525, Habana Vieja; ☎ 10am-8pm) Perhaps Habana's best spot for Spanish-language books.

Plaza de Armas Secondhand Book Market (Map p94; cnr Obispo & Tacón, Habana Vieja) Old, new and rare books; some in English.

Cultural Centers

Alliance Française (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 33 70; Calle G No 407 btwn Calles 17 & 19, Vedado) Free French films Monday (11am), Wednesday (3pm) and Friday (5pm); good place to meet Cubans (including children for French travelers with kids) interested in French culture.

Casa de las Américas (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 27 06/07; cnr Calles 3 & G, Vedado) Powerhouse of Cuban and Latin American culture, with conferences, exhibitions, a gallery, book launches and concerts. The casa's annual literary award is one of the Spanish-speaking world's most prestigious. Pick up a schedule of weekly events in the library. Hosts an international seminar on Afro-Cuban culture every August.

Casa de la Cultura Centro Habana (Map pp106-7; ☎ 878-4727; Av Salvador Allende No 720); Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 863-4860; Aguiar No 509); Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 831-2023; Calzada No 909) High-quality concerts and festivals.

Fundación Alejo Carpentier (Map p94; Empedrado No 215, Habana Vieja; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Near the Plaza de la Catedral. Check for cultural events at this baroque former palace of the Condessa de la Reunión (1820s) where Carpentier set his famous novel *El Siglo de las Luces (Explosion in a Cathedral)*.

Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP; Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 23 95; Paseo No 406 btwn Calles 17 & 19, Vedado; ☎ 11am-11pm) Rocking cultural and musical events in elegant mansion (1926); restaurant, bar and cigar shop also here.

Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (Unear; Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-4551; cnr Calles 17 & H, Vedado) The pulse-beat of the Cuban arts scene, this place is the first point of call for anyone with more than a passing interest in poetry, literature, art and music.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 40 50 93/4)

Asistur (Map p100; ☎ 33 85 27, 33 89 20; asisten@asisten.get.cma.net; Casa del Científico, Paseo de Martí No 212, Centro Habana; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Someone on staff should speak English; the alarm center here is open 24 hours.

Poison Control (☎ 260-1230, 260-8751)

GETTING IN FROM THE AIRPORT

Habana airport is notoriously inaccessible by public transport. For first-time visitors a taxi is your best bet. Shop around at the arrivals terminal and you should get something in the vicinity of CUC\$20.

Old stalwarts or those in the know might want to wait around for the sporadic terminal connector bus (a red, white and blue vehicle with 'conexión' displayed on the front) which for CUC\$1 will drop you in nearby Av Boyeros where a cheaper yellow or white Lada taxi will take you into the centre for CUC\$10 to CUC\$15.

Internet Access

Biblioteca Nacional de Ciencias y Técnica (Map p100; Capitolio Nacional, cnr Paseo de Martí & Brasil, Centro Habana; ☎ 8:15am-5pm Mon-Fri) Enter through stairs on left of main entrance.

Cibercafé Capitolio (Map p100; ☎ 862-0485; cnr Paseo de Martí & Brasil; per hr CUC\$5; ☎ 8am-8pm) Inside main entrance.

Cibercorreo (Map p94; Obispo No 457 btwn Villegas & Aguacate; ☎ 8am-6pm; per hr CUC\$4.50)

Eteca Centro (Map p100; Aguiar No 565; ☎ 8am-9:30pm); Habana Vieja (Map p94; Habana 406) You can't miss this magnificent building.

Hotel Business Centers Hotel Habana Libre (Map pp106-7; Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25); Hotel Inglaterra (Map p100; Paseo de Martí No 416); Hotel Nacional (Map pp106-7; cnr Calles O & 21, Vedado); Hotel NH Parque Central (Map p100; Neptuno cnr Paseo de Martí & Zulueta, Centro Habana) Usually a couple Convertibles more expensive, but reliable and shorter wait times.

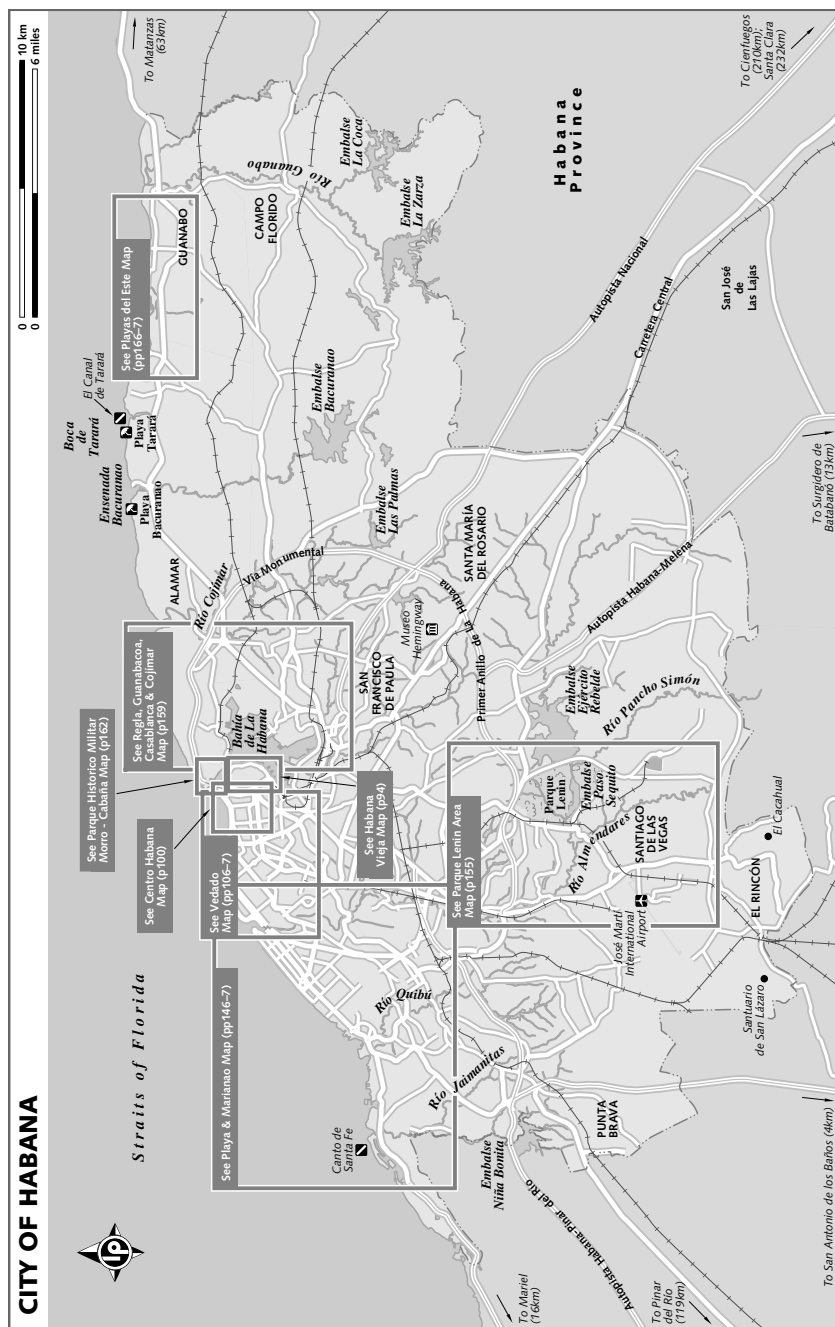
Laundry

Lavandería Alaska (Map p94; ☎ 863-0463; Villegas No 256; ☎ 6am-5pm Mon-Sat) Laundromat charging CUC\$3 a load to wash and dry.

Libraries

Foreign students with a Carnet (or letter from their academic institution) can get library cards. Each library requires its own card; show up with two passport photos. The following are open to the public, except for the Casa de las Américas' closed stacks, which require a card.

Biblioteca José A Echevarría (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-6380; Casa de las Américas, Av de Presidentes No 210) Best art, architecture and general culture collection; books can't leave library.



Biblioteca Nacional José Martí (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 54 42; Av de la Independencia, Plaza de la Revolución; 🕒 8am-5:45pm Mon-Sat) Habana's biggest library. Book and magazine launches are often held here.

Biblioteca Rubén M Villena (Map p94; ☎ 862-9038; cnr Obispo & Bararillo, Habana Vieja; 🕒 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sat) Nice reading rooms and garden.

Media

Cuba has a fantastic radio culture, where you'll hear everything from salsa to Supertramp, plus live sports broadcasts and soap operas. Radio is also the best source for listings on concerts, plays, movies and dances.

Radio Ciudad de la Habana (820AM & 94.9 FM) Cuban tunes by day, foreign pop at night; great '70s flashback at 8pm on Thursday and Friday.

Radio Metropolitana (910AM & 98.3 FM) Jazz and traditional boleros (music in 3/4 time); excellent Sunday afternoon rock show.

Radio Musical Nacional (590AM & 99.1FM) Classical.

Radio Progreso (640AM & 90.3 FM) Soap operas and humor.

Radio Rebelde (640AM, 710AM & 96.7 FM) News, interviews, good mixed music, plus baseball games.

Radio Reloj (950AM & 101.5 FM) News, plus the time every minute of every day.

Radio Taíno (1290AM & 93.3 FM) National tourism station with music, listings and interviews in Spanish and English. Nightly broadcasts (5pm to 7pm) list what's happening around town.

Medical Services

Many of Cuba's specialist hospitals offering services to foreigners are based in Habana; see the site www.cubanacan.cu for details. Also consult the Playa & Marianao section of this chapter (p145) for listings of pharmacies and hospitals serving the diplomatic community.

Centro Oftalmológico Camilo Cienfuegos (Map pp106-7; cnr Calle L No 151 & Calle 13, Vedado) Head straight here with eye problems; also has an excellent pharmacy.

Drogería Johnson (Map p94; ☎ 862-6870; Obispo No 260, Habana Vieja; 🕒 24hr) Old-fashioned pharmacy in pesos.

Farmacia Homopática (Map pp106-7; cnr Calles 23 & M, Vedado; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

Farmacia: Hotel Habana Libre (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 45 93; Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25, Vedado) Products sold in Convertibles.

Farmacia Taquechel (Map p94; ☎ 862-9286; Obispo No 155, Habana Vieja; 🕒 9am-6pm) Next to the Hotel

Ambos Mundos. Cuban wonder drugs such as anticholesterol medication PPG sold in pesos here.

Hospital Nacional Hermanos Ameijeiras (Map pp106-7; ☎ 877-6053; fax 33 50 36; San Lázaro No 701, Centro Habana) Special hard-currency services; general consultations (CUC\$25), hospitalization (CUC\$75 per night) and cosmetic surgery. Enter via the lower level below the parking lot off Padre Varela (ask for 'CEDA' in Section N).

Money

Banco de Crédito y Comercio Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 76 33; cnr Línea & Paseo) Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 870-2684; Airline Bldg, Calle 23); Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 879-2074; Av Independencia No 101) The last – in post office between Terminal de Ómnibus and Plaza de la Revolución – is most convenient to immigration for visa extension stamps. Expect lines.

Banco Financiero Internacional Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 860-9369; cnr Oficinas & Brasil); Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 44 29; Hotel Habana Libre, Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25)

Banco Metropolitano Centro Habana (Map p100; cnr Av de Italia & San Martín); Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 33 167; cnr Línea & Calle M, Vedado)

Cadeca Centro Habana (Map p100; cnr Neptuno & Agramonte; 🕒 9am-noon, 1-7pm Mon-Sat); Habana Vieja (Map p94; cnr Oficinas & Lamparilla; 🕒 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun); Vedado (Map pp106-7; Calle 23 btwn K & L; 🕒 7am-2:30pm, 3:30-10pm); Vedado (Map pp106-7; mercado agropecuario, Calle 19 btwn Calles A & B; 🕒 7am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun); Vedado (Map pp106-7; cnr Malecón & Calle D) Cadeca gives cash advances and changes traveler's checks at 3.5% commission Monday to Friday (4% weekends).

Cambio (Map p94; Obispo No 257, Habana Vieja; 🕒 8am-10pm) The best opening hours in town.

Post

DHL Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-2112; Calzada No 818 btwn Calles 2 & 4; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri); Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 00 04; Hotel Nacional, cnr Calles O & 21).

Post offices Centro Habana (Map p100; Gran Teatro, cnr San Martín & Paseo de Martí); Habana Vieja (Map p94; Plaza de San Francisco de Asís, Oficinas No 102); Habana Vieja (Map p94; Unidad de Filatelia, Obispo No 518; 🕒 9am-7pm); Vedado (Map pp106-7; cnr Línea & Paseo; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat); Vedado (Map pp106-7; cnr Calles 23 & C; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat); Vedado (Map pp106-7; Av de la Independencia btwn Plaza de la Revolución & Terminal de Ómnibus; 🕒 stamp sales 24hr) This last has many services including photo developing, a bank and Cadeca. The Museo Postal Cubano (☎ 870-5581; admission CUC\$1; open 10am to 5pm Saturday

and Sunday) here has a philatelic shop. The post office at Obispo, Habana Vieja also has stamps for collectors.

Telephone

Etecsa Centro Habana (Map p100; Aguilar No 565; ☎ 8am-9:30pm); Habana Vieja (Map p94; cnr Habana 406 & Obispo) There's also a Museo de las Telecomunicaciones (open 9am to 6pm Tuesday to Saturday) here.

Toilets

Not over-endowed with clean available public washrooms, your best bet is to slip subtly into an upscale hotel. The following are all fairly relaxed about toilet security.

Hotel Ambos Mundos (Map p94; Obispo No 153) Tip the attendant.

Hotel Habana Libre (Map pp106-7; Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25) Upstairs and by the elevators.

Hotel Nacional (Map pp106-7; Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25) Right in the lobby and left past the elevators.

Hotel Sevilla (Map p100; Trocadero No 55 btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte) Turn right inside the lobby.

Tourist Information

Buró de Convenciones de Cuba (Map pp106-7; ☎ 66 20 15; Calle M btwn Calles 17 & 19, Vedado; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Conferences, special events and festival information available here.

Infotur Airport (Map p155; ☎ 66 61 01; Terminal 3 Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí; ☎ 24hr); Ex pocuba (Map p155; ☎ 66 43 96; Carretera de Rocio Km 3.5); Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 33 33 33; Obispo btwn

Bernaza & Villegas); Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 63 68 84; cnr Obispo & San Ignacio; ☎ 10am-1pm, 2-7pm) Books excursions, sells maps and phonecards, transport schedules.

Travel Agencies

Many of the following agencies also have offices in the international arrivals lounge of Terminal 3.

Cubamar (Map pp106-7; ☎ 831-3151; www.cubamar.viajes.cu; cnr Calle 3 & Malecón, Vedado; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Travel agency for Campismo Popular cabins countrywide. Also rents mobile homes.

Cubanacán Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 873-2686; Hotel Nacional, cnr Calles O & 21; ☎ 8am-7pm); Vedado (Map pp106-7; Calle 23 btwn Calles N & O) Very helpful; head here if you want to arrange fishing or diving at Marina Hemingway; also in Hotel NH Parque Central, Hotel Inglaterra and Habana Libre.

Cubatur (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 31 70/1; cnr Calles 23 & M, Vedado; ☎ 8am-8pm) Below Hotel Habana Libre. This agency pulls a lot of weight and finds rooms where others can't, which goes a long way toward explaining its slacker attitude.

Havanatur (Map pp106-7; ☎ 830-8227; Galerías de Paseo, cnr Calle 1 & Paseo, Vedado)

San Cristóbal Agencia de Viajes (Map p94; ☎ 861-9171/2; www.sancristobaltravel.com; Oficios No 110 btwn Lamparilla & Amargura, Habana Vieja; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-2pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Habaguanex agency operates Habana Vieja's classic hotels; income helps finance restoration.

Sol y Son (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 32 71; fax 33 51 50; Calle 23 No 64; ☎ 8:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat) Sells Cubana flights.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Habana is an ostensibly safe city, and violent crime is rare. A heavy police presence on the streets and stiff prison sentences for crimes such as robbery and assault have acted as a major deterrent to potential thieves and kept the dirty tentacles of organized crime firmly at bay.

That is not to say that incidents do not occur. Indeed petty crime against tourists is on the rise in Habana, with bag snatching by youths mounted on bicycles a particular worry.

Keep your money belt on you at all times making sure that you wear it concealed – and tightly secured – around your waist.

In hotels always use a safety deposit box (if there is one) and never leave money/passports/credit cards lying around during the day. Theft from hotel rooms was particularly rife in Habana at the time of writing, with the temptation of earning three times your monthly salary in one fell swoop often too hard to resist.

In bars and restaurants it is wise to always check your change. Purposeful overcharging, especially when someone is mildly inebriated, is tediously common.

Visitors from the well-ordered countries of Europe or litigation-obsessed North America should be subconsciously aware of crumbling sidewalks, manholes with no covers, over-enthusiastic drivers, veering cyclists, carelessly lobbed front door keys (in Centro Habana) and badly-pitched baseballs (almost everywhere). Waves cascading over the Malecón sea-wall might look romantic, but the resulting slime-fest has been known to throw Lonely Planet-wielding tourists flying unceremoniously onto their asses.

For more popular scams see the boxed text, p114.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES Habana Vieja

Colonial Habana is packed full with museums, art galleries, churches, restaurants and drinking houses; way too much to see in a day or three, though most of the sights can be visited on foot. For a whistle-stop intro-

duction to the best parts of the city, check out the suggested walking tours (p111) or stick closely to the four main squares of Armas, Vieja, San Francisco and Catedral.

PLAZA DE LA CATEDRAL

Dominated by two unequal towers, the **Catedral de San Cristóbal de la Habana** (cnr San Ignacio & Empedrado; ☎ before noon) was described by novelist Alejo Carpentier as 'music set in stone.' Its striking baroque facade (à la Italian architect Francesco Borromini) creates unrivaled ambience, especially at night when live music mingles with laughter in the wide open plaza. The Jesuits began construction of the church in 1748, and work continued despite their expulsion in 1767. When the building was finished in 1787 the diocese of Habana was created. A year later the city became a bishop's seat, elevating the church to a cathedral – one of the oldest in the Americas. Perhaps the best time to visit is during Mass, celebrated Sunday at 10:30am; smaller services happen in the adjacent chapel Monday to Friday at 8pm.

While circumnavigating the plaza, be sure to visit the **Centro Wilfredo Lam** (☎ 862-2611; cnr San Ignacio & Empedrado; admission CUC\$3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) next to the cathedral, which displays the works of one of Cuba's leading modern painters and hosts shows by local and international artists. A Cuban of Chinese and African ancestry, Lam was strongly influenced by Pablo Picasso, whom he met in 1936. Many other noble buildings face the Plaza de la Catedral, including the 1760 **Palacio de los Marqueses de Aguas Claras** (San Ignacio No 54), now drawing crowds as Restaurante El Patio. The outdoor tables make a nice spot for a break.

Across the square are the 18th-century **Casa de Lombillo** and the **Palacio del Marqués de Arcos** (1746), today a Telecorreo International office. During the mid-19th century this palace served as Habana's main post office and the stone mask ornamental mailbox built into the wall is still in use.

The **Museo de Arte Colonial** (☎ 862-6440; San Ignacio No 61; unguided/guided CUC\$2/3, plus camera CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-6:30pm), on the southern side of the plaza, displays colonial furniture and decorative arts in the **Palacio de los Condes de Casa Bayona** (1720), the oldest house on the square. One of the funkier sights around here (aside from the folkloric mulattas

HABANA IN...

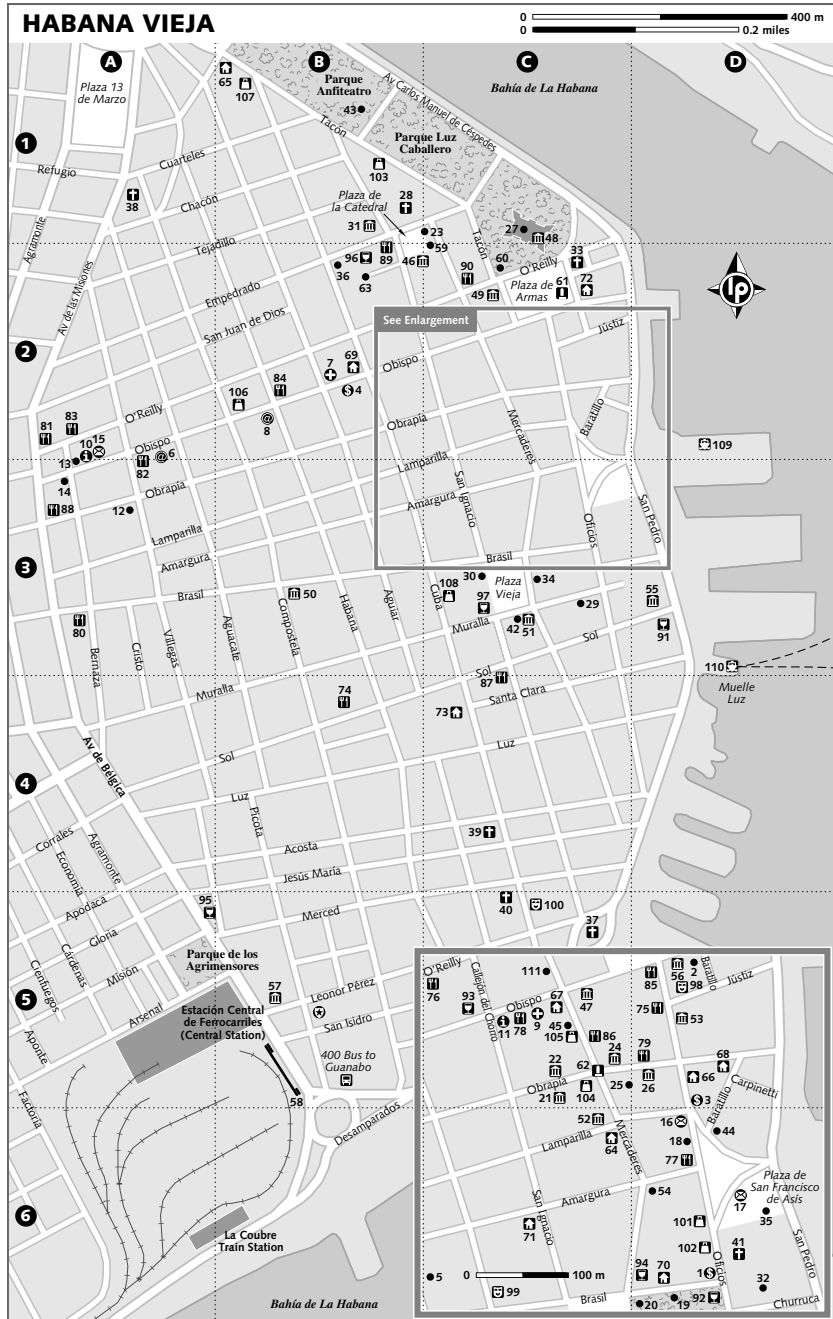
Two Days

Splash out on an early breakfast in the elegant **Hotel Sevilla** (p119), with bird's-eye views over the city from the famous 9th-floor restaurant. The **Museo de la Revolución** (p102) will take up most of the morning but clear your head afterwards with a revitalizing stroll through **Habana Vieja** (opposite) taking in the four archetypal 16th-century plazas. Take lunch in **El Patio** (p126) and spend the afternoon in the **Museo Nacional de Bella Artes** (p102). Grab dinner and a flamenco show in the **Mesón de la Flota** (p119) in Mercaderes afterwards.

Head west on day two through Centro stopping off at the **Callejón de Hamel** (p115) en route. Grab an ice cream in the **Coppelia** (p130) and a mojito in the **Hotel Nacional** (p104) and stroll back along the **Malecón** (p110) at sunset toward El Prado. Taxi it to La Cabaña for the 9pm **cañonazo ceremony** (p115) and get back in time for a late dinner in **La Dominica** (p125).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, with day three split between the **Plaza de la Revolución** (p105), and the **Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás** (p99). Buy a copy of *Cartelera* and check out the nighttime activities at **Unecac** (p89) or the **Casa de la Música** (p135) before hitting the **Miramar paladar** (p151) scene for delicious dinner. On day four, pack up your beach bag and head out to the **Playas del Este** (p164) for the day.



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Cadeca.....	3 D5
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Etceta.....	8 B2
Farmacia Taquechel.....	9 C5
Infotur.....	10 A2
Infotur.....	11 C5
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Mondadovi.....	(see 60)
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Cámara Oscura.....	20 D6
Casa de África.....	21 C5
Casa de la Obra Pia.....	22 C5
Casa de Lombillo.....	23 C1
Casa de México Benito Juárez.....	24 C5
Casa del Albanico.....	25 C5
Casa Oswaldo Guayasamin.....	26 D5
Castillo de la Real Fuerza.....	27 C1
Catedral de San Cristóbal de la Habana.....	28 B1
Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau.....	29 C3
Centro de Desarrollo de los Artes Visuales.....	30 C3
Centro Wilfredo Lam.....	31 B1
Coche Mambi.....	32 D6
Diago Galería de Arte.....	(see 42)
El Templete.....	33 C2
Fototeca de Cuba.....	34 C3
Fuente de los Leones.....	35 D6
Fundación Alejo Carpentier.....	36 B2
Iglesia de San Francisco de Paula.....	37 C5
Iglesia del Santo Angel Custodio.....	38 A1
Iglesia Parroquial del Espíritu Santo.....	39 C4
Iglesia y Convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced.....	40 C5
Iglesia y Convento de Santa Clara.....	(see 73)
Agropecuário Sol.....	74 B4
Al Medina.....	75 D5
Bar-Restaurant La Luz.....	(see 78)
Café de O'Reilly.....	76 C5
Café del Oriente.....	77 D6
Café Santo Domingo.....	78 C5
Café Wilfredo Lam.....	(see 31)
Cafetería Torre La Vega.....	79 D5
El Meceruo.....	(see 44)
Hanoi.....	80 A3
Harris Brothers.....	81 A2
Heladería Obispo.....	82 A3
La Julia.....	83 A2
La Lluvia de Oro.....	84 B2
La Mina.....	85 D5
La Torre de Marfil.....	86 C5
Paladar La Mulata del Sabor.....	87 C4
Restaurante El Castillo de Farnés.....	88 A3
Restaurante El Patio.....	89 B2
Restaurante La Dominicana.....	90 C2
Restaurante La Paella.....	(see 66)
Restaurante Mirador de la Bahía.....	(see 56)
Bar Dos Hermanos.....	91 D3
Bar La Marina.....	92 D6
Café Paris.....	93 C5
Café Taberna.....	94 D6
El Baturro.....	95 A5
La Bodeguita del Medio.....	96 B2
Taberna de la Muralla.....	97 C3
Casa de la Comedia.....	98 D5
Casa de la Cultura de La Habana Vieja.....	99 C6
Gimnasio de Boxeo Rafael Trejo.....	100 C5
Casa de Carmen Montilla.....	101 D6
Estudio Galería Los Oficios.....	102 D6
Fería de la Artesanía.....	103 B1
Fundación Havana Club Shop.....	(see 55)
Habana 1791.....	104 C5
La Casa del Habano.....	105 C5
Longina Música.....	106 B2
Palacio de la Artesanía.....	107 B1
Taller de Serigrafía René Portocarrero.....	108 C3
Cruise Ship Terminal.....	109 D2
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Horse Carriages.....	111 C5

posing for pictures) is the **Taller Experimental de Gráfica** (☎ 862-0979; tgráfica@cubarte.cult.cu; Callejón del Chorro No 6; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) up the alley from the southwestern corner of Plaza de la Catedral. You will see reams of original prints freshly inked and hanging to dry; you can buy what you like. This work-

shop accepts serious students interested in mastering the art of engraving (see Courses, p114).

PLAZA DE ARMAS

This lovely plaza and book bazaar was the seat of authority and power in Cuba for

400 years. A square has existed on this site since 1582, although the present Plaza de Armas dates only from 1792. In the center of the park surrounded by stately royal palms is a marble **statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes** (1955), the man who set Cuba on the road to independence in 1868. Live music floats about, while the breeze flutters over the Malecón – it's a nice spot to chill out.

With lots of stained glass and gigantic chandeliers, the baroque **Palacio de los Capitanes Generales**, on the western side of the Plaza de Armas, is one of Cuba's most majestic buildings. Construction began on the site of the old parochial church in 1776, and from 1791 until 1898 this was the residence of the Spanish governor. From 1899 until 1902, the US military governors were based here, after which the building became the presidential palace. In 1920 the president moved to the building now housing the Museo de la Revolución in Centro Habana and this palace became the city hall. The municipal authorities moved out in 1967 and since 1968 it has been home to the **Museo de la Ciudad** (☎ 861-6130; Calle Tacón No 1; unguided/guided CUC\$3/4, plus camera CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-6pm). Peacocks strut about the courtyard, there's a spooky crypt and an even more eerie Jesus. The marble bathtubs are marvelous. The guided tour gets you behind the velvet ropes and up close with the lush collection. Come early to beat the tour-bus crowd.

The **Palacio del Segundo Cabo** (O'Reilly No 4; admission CUC\$1), the former headquarters of the Spanish vice-governor at the northwestern corner of the plaza, is another baroque beauty, built in 1772. Later it became the Supreme Court, and today it houses the **Instituto Cubano del Libro**. It's worth glimpsing into the arcaded inner courtyard and visiting the very good (with air-con) bookshop here. Pop-art fans should take a look in the **Sala Galería Raúl Martínez** (☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat).

On the northeastern side of the Plaza de Armas is the oldest extant colonial fortress in the Americas, the **Castillo de la Real Fuerza**, built between 1558 and 1577 on the site of an earlier fort destroyed by French privateers in 1555. The west tower is crowned by the famous bronze weather vane called **La Giraldilla**, cast in Habana in 1632 by Jerónimo

Martínez Pinzón and popularly believed to be Doña Inés de Bobadilla, the wife of explorer Hernando de Soto. The original Giraldilla is in the Museo de la Ciudad and the figure also appears on the Havana Club rum label. The Spanish governor resided in the castle for 200 years until they finally got around to constructing a palace of their own across the square. La Fuerza now shelters the **Museo de la Cerámica Artística Cubana** (☎ 861-6130; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-6pm) downstairs. Worth a look, this museum displays works by some of Cuba's leading contemporary artists. Upstairs affords a great view of the harbor entrance.

In 1519 the Villa de San Cristóbal de la Habana was founded on the spot marked by **El Templete** (admission CUC\$2; ☎ 8:30am-6pm) a neoclassical Doric chapel erected on the eastern side of the Plaza de Armas in 1828. The first Mass was held below a ceiba tree similar to the one presently in front of the building, and inside the chapel are three paintings of the event by the French painter Jean Baptiste Vermay. Adjacent to El Templete is the late-18th-century **Palacio de los Condes de Santovenia**, today the five-star, 27-room Hotel Santa Isabel. Nearby is the **Museo Nacional de Historia Natural** (☎ 863-9361; Obispo No 61; admission CUC\$3; ☎ 9:30am-7pm Tue-Sun), which contains examples of Cuba's flora and fauna. The restaurant-bar upstairs has fabulous vistas across the bay.

Perhaps one of Habana's most amusing sights is the small and vaguely surreal **Museo del Automóvil** (Oficios No 13; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-7pm), stuffed full with ancient Thunderbirds and Pontiacs and Ford Model Ts, at least half of which appear to be in better shape than the asthmatic automobiles in the streets outside. They've even got the car that Che Guevara once drove (very badly apparently) after he was installed as a member of the revolutionary government as head of the National Bank.

ALONG MERCADERES & OBRAPÍA

This stretch is packed with quirky little places such as the **Museo de Arte del Lejano Oriente** (☎ 863-9740; Mercaderes No 111; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), with Far Eastern art, and the **Museo de Tabaco** (☎ 861-5795; Mercaderes No 120; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), where you can gawp at various indigenous pipes and idols. The **Maqueta de la Habana Vieja** (Mercaderes No 114;

unguided/guided CUC\$1/2; ☎ 9am-6pm) is a 1:500 scale model of Habana Vieja complete with an authentic soundtrack meant to replicate a day in the life of the city. It's incredibly detailed and provides an excellent way of geographically acquainting yourself with what the central historical district has to offer. Go here first. You might glimpse a young woman celebrating her *quinceñera* (Cuban rite of passage for girls turning 15) at **Casa de la Obra Pía** (Obrapia No 158; admission CUC\$1, plus camera CUC\$2; 9am-4:30pm Tue-Sat, ☎ 9:30am-12:30pm Sun) around the corner. This typical Habana aristocratic residence was originally built in the first half of the 17th century and rebuilt in 1780 soon after the British occupation. Decorative flourishes cover the exterior facade, and between the two inner courtyards is a wonderfully refreshing room. Across the street is the **Casa de África** (☎ 861-5798; Obrapia No 157) housing artifacts from Fidel Castro's 1977 African tour, plus sacred objects relating to Santería, formerly in the collection of ethnographer Fernando Ortíz.

On the corner of Mercaderes and Obrapia is a bronze **statue** of Latin America liberator Simón Bolívar, to whom a **museum** (☎ 861-3988; Mercaderes No 160; donations accepted; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is dedicated nearby. The **Casa de México Benito Juárez** (☎ 861-8166; Obrapia No 116; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10:15am-5:45pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) exhibits Mexican folk art in an 18th-century palace; there's a specialized library here for all things *mexicana*. Just east is the **Casa Oswaldo Guayasamín** (☎ 861-3843; Obrapia No 111; donations accepted; ☎ 9am-2:30pm Tue-Sun), the old studio, now a museum, of the great Ecuadorian painter. (Fidel sat for Guayasamín; to see the portrait, visit the Fundación Naturaleza y El Hombre, p148.) Openings and exhibits of Cuban and international art are held here.

PLAZA DE SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS

Another of Habana Vieja's picturesque plazas, **Plaza de San Francisco de Asís** is a dockside beauty dominated by the domed **Lonja del Comercio**, a former commodities market erected in 1909 and restored in 1996 to provide office space for foreign companies with joint ventures in Cuba. Enter the building to admire its central dome. Across from 'La Lonja' is the white marble **Fuente de los Leones** (Fountain of Lions) carved by the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Gagini in 1836.

The southern side of the square is taken up by the impressive **Iglesia y Monasterio de San Francisco de Asís**. Originally constructed in 1608 and rebuilt in the baroque style from 1719 to 1738, San Francisco de Asís was taken over by the Spanish state in 1841 as part of a political move against the powerful religious orders of the day, when it ceased to be a church. Today the church itself is a **concert hall** (☎ starting 5pm or 6pm) hosting classical, chamber and choral music and a **museum** (☎ 862-3467; admission CUC\$1, plus camera CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5:30pm) in the two large cloisters. Price of admission allows access to the tallest church tower in Habana; money well spent.

MUSEO DEL RON

Even for teetotalers, the intriguing **Museo del Ron** (☎ 861-8051; San Pedro No 262; admission incl guide CUC\$5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) in the Fundación Havana Club is worth a turn. The interesting bilingual guided tour shows rum-making antiquities (check out the funky terra-cotta flask), plus explains the entire brewing process, from cane cutting to quaffing amber Añejo Reserva in the museum's tasting room. The scale model of the Central La Esperanza, with working train, is especially cool. The dancing lessons here are said to be excellent (see Courses, p114).

PLAZA VIEJA

Certainly one of Habana Vieja's most dazzling public spaces, **Plaza Vieja**, dating from the 16th century, is surrounded by several sites not to be missed. It was an open-air marketplace until 1835, and hideous underground parking lot during the Batista regime; since the mid-1990s there has been a concerted effort to restore this plaza to its former grandeur. On the northwestern corner is Habana's **cámara oscura** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), providing live, 360-degree views of the city from atop a 35m-tall tower. Sheets flap in the breeze, old cars amble by and the docent does an admirable job explaining Habana's architectural highlights in Spanish and English. In the arcade adjacent is **Fototeca de Cuba** (☎ 862-2530; Mercaderes No 307; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), a photo gallery with intriguing exhibits by local and international artists.

On the southern side of the plaza is the quirky **Museo de Naipes** (Muralla No 101; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun), with a collection of every playing card imaginable. Rock stars, rum drinks, round cards – they’ve got 2000 of them here. Next door is **La Casona Centro de Arte** (☎ 861-8544; Muralla No 107; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), with great solo and group shows by up-and-coming Cuban artists such as Abel Barroso. Also here is **Diago Galería de Arte** (☎ 863-4703). On the western side of the park is yet another gallery in another gorgeous colonial building at the **Centro de Desarrollo de los Artes Visuales** (☎ 862-2611; San Ignacio No 352; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat); here you’ll find good contemporary Cuban art.

Around the corner, the **Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau** (☎ 861-6251; www.centropablo.cult.cu; Muralla No 63; admission free; ☎ 9am-5:30pm Tue-Sat) hosts a variety of exhibitions of substance, including poetry readings and a live acoustic music series called ‘Guitarra Limpia.’ Its Salón de Arte Digital is renowned for its groundbreaking digital art.

Sidetrack up Brasil and you’ll stumble upon the **Museo de la Farmacia Habanera** (nr Brasil & Compostela; admission free) founded in 1886 by Catalan José Sarrá and once considered the second most important pharmacy in the

world. The museum got the Habaguanex makeover in 2004 and, aside from the elegant mock-up of an old drugstore with some interesting historical explanations; it still acts as a working shop for Cubans.

CHURCHES

South of Plaza Vieja are a string of stunning and important churches. The 1638–43 **Iglesia y Convento de Santa Clara** (☎ 866-9327; Cuba No 610; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) stopped being a convent in 1920. Later this complex was the Ministry of Public Works, and today the Habana Vieja restoration team is based there. You can visit the large cloister and nuns’ cemetery or even spend the night (with reservations far in advance, see p117). Habana’s oldest surviving church (built in 1640, and rebuilt in 1674) is the **Iglesia Parroquial del Espíritu Santo** (☎ 862-3140; Acosta 161; ☎ 8am-noon, 3-6pm), with many burials in the crypt. Built in 1755 the **Iglesia y Convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced** (Cuba No 806; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-5:30pm) was reconstructed in the 19th century. Beautiful gilded altars, frescoed vaults and a number of old paintings create a sacrosanct mood; there’s a quiet cloister adjacent.

The **Iglesia de San Francisco de Paula** (☎ 41 50 37; nr Leonor Pérez & Desamparados) is one of Haba-

na’s most attractive churches. Fully restored in 2000, this church is all that remains of the San Francisco de Paula women’s hospital from the mid-1700s. Lit up at night for concerts (most notably by the medieval ensemble *Ars Longa*) the stained glass, heavy cupola and baroque facade are utterly romantic and inviting.

MUSEO-CASA NATAL DE JOSÉ MARTÍ

If you visit only one *casa natal* (birth house) in Cuba, make it **Museo-Casa Natal de José Martí** (☎ 861-3778; Leonor Pérez No 314; admission CUC\$1, plus camera CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat), the birthplace of José Martí. The apostle of Cuban independence was born in this humble dwelling on January 28, 1853, and the museum displays letters, manuscripts, photos, books and other mementos of his life. Nearby, to the west across Av de Bélgica, is the longest remaining stretch of the **old city wall** (building began in 1674). A bronze map shows the outline of the original layout. To the west is Habana’s huge Estación Central de Ferrocarriles where *La Junta*, the steam locomotive that inaugurated the line to Matanzas in 1843, is on display.

Centro Habana

CAPITOLIO NACIONAL

Washington, DC and Habana have more in common than you may think, evidenced by the dominating marble-covered **Capitolio Nacional** (☎ 863-7861; admission unguided/guided CUC\$3/4; ☎ 9am-8pm), which is similar to the US Capitol Building, but richer in detail. This is one of Habana’s divine architectural highlights. To enter, climb the monumental stairway on the eastern side of the building. The tour is highly recommended.

Initiated by the US-backed dictator Gerardo Machado in 1929, the Capitolio took 5000 workers three years, two months and 20 days to build at a cost of the equivalent of US\$17 million. It was the seat of the Cuban Congress until 1959 and now houses the Cuban Academy of Sciences and the National Library of Science and Technology. Entering the great domed hall through huge bronze doors (notice the important events in Cuban history they depict) imbues just how monumental this building is.

Across what seems like kilometers of intricately laid portico marble is the 49-metric-ton, 17m statue of the republic (a

woman, don’t you know?), the third-largest indoor bronze statue in the world; only the Buddha in Nava, Japan, and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, are bigger. Directly below the Capitolio’s 62m-high dome, a 24-carat diamond replica is set in the floor. Highway distances between Habana and all sites in Cuba are calculated from this point. Visitors are also shown the mahogany-covered library and the former chambers of the Senate and Deputies. It’s an extraordinary edifice and you can spend a whole afternoon gawking at the architectural details, taking coffee at the lovely balcony café (see p129).

Behind the Capitolio is the **Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás** (☎ 862-0086; Industria No 520 btwn Barcelona & Dragones; ☎ tours every 15 min btwn 9:30-11am & 12:30-3pm); for tours of this and other Habana cigar factories, see the boxed text, p110.

PARQUE LA FRATERNIDAD

The **Fuente de la India** (the traffic island at Dragones near Máximo Gómez, east of the park) is a white Carrara marble fountain carved by Giuseppe Gagini in 1837. Honoring heritage old and new, the sculpture is an indigenous girl seated above four dolphins, a famous symbol of Habana. She’s embracing the city’s coat of arms.

Just east of the sculpture across Paseo de Martí is the **Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba** (☎ 863-5953; Paseo de Martí No 615; admission CUC\$6; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat). The museum here provides a worthwhile overview of the Santería religion, the saints and their powers. There are free *tambores* (Santería drum ceremonies) here alternate Fridays at 4:30pm (when you can check out the museum for free), and you can arrange consultations as well. Note that there’s a church dress code for the *tambores* (no shorts or tank tops).

Across the street is leafy **Parque de la Fraternidad**, originally a Spanish military parade ground. The first park was laid out here in 1892 to commemorate the fourth centenary of the Spanish arrival in the Americas, and in 1928 the park was remodeled in honor of the Pan-American Conference hosted in Habana that year. The grand ceiba tree dominating the park was planted in a mixture of soil from all the countries of the Americas, and busts of prominent Latin and North Americans were set up in the vicinity

RESTORING OLD HABANA

Stuffed with architectural jewels from every era, Habana Vieja offers visitors one of the finest collections of urban edifices in the Americas. At a conservative estimate, Habana Vieja alone contains more than 900 buildings of historical importance with myriad examples of illustrious architecture ranging from intricate baroque to glitzy art deco.

Since 1982, when Unesco added Habana Vieja to its World Heritage list, a massive regeneration project has been rolled out under the auspices of longstanding city historian, Eusebio Leal.

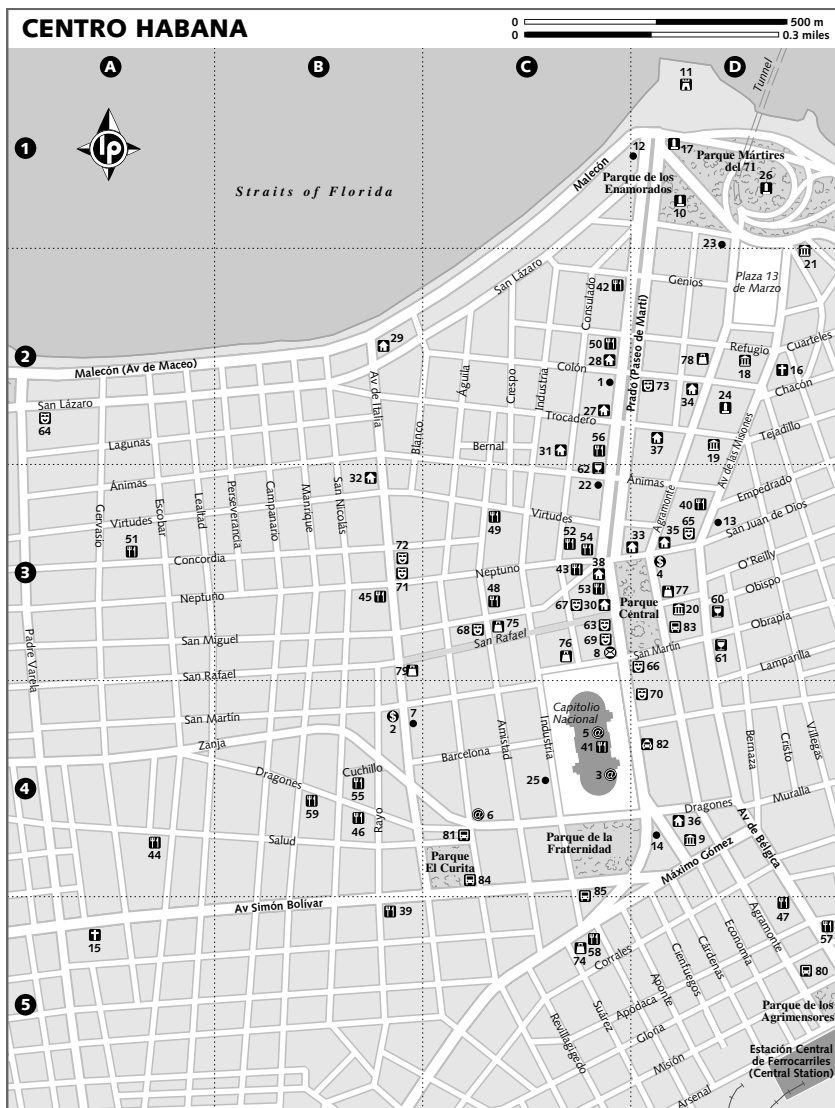
Acting in tandem with a government-run company Habaguanex, Leal’s restoration is being mapped out in stages with priority being given to buildings that once revamped will generate enough tourist Convertibles to finance further renovation schemes.

At any one time Habaguanex’ combined operations employ more than 10,000 people and generate up to the equivalent of US\$160 million a year in profits. Of this cash approximately 45% is reinvested into new projects, 30% is earmarked for social programs, while the remaining 25% is channeled into state reserves for deserving schemes elsewhere in the city.

But remodeled buildings are only half the story. ‘We have decided in favor of a living historic centre,’ master plan architect Patricia Rodríguez is on record as saying.

Unique among projects of this type, Leal’s makeover also includes major social and cultural benefits for Habana Vieja’s long-suffering population of 70,000 people, 45% of whom still live in houses deemed unfit for human habitation.

Among the social projects sponsored by the institution in the last few years are a maternity home, 10 refurbished schools and a rehabilitation center for children with diseases of the central nervous system.



(including Abe Lincoln, a hero in Cuba). Today this area is the terminus of numerous city bus routes, and you'll see rows of lovingly restored American cars sparkling in the morning sunlight. Cubans dub this antiquated parking lot 'Jurassic Park.'

A little out on a limb, but well worth the walk, is the **Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús**

(Av Simon Bolivar btwn Gervasio & Padre Varela), an inspiring marble creation with a distinctive white steeple, where you can enjoy a few precious minutes of quiet and cool contemplation away from the craziness of the street. This church is rightly famous for its magnificent stained-glass windows and the light that penetrates through the eaves first

INFORMATION		Statue of General Máximo Gómez.....26 D1		DRINKING ☑	
Asistur.....	1 C2	Casa del Científico.....	27 C2	El Florida.....	60 D3
Banco Metropolitano.....	2 B4	Hotel Caribbean.....	28 C2	La Zarogazana.....	(see 60)
Biblioteca Nacional de Ciencias y Técnica.....	3 C4	Hotel Deauville.....	29 B2	Monserrate Bar.....	61 D3
Cadeca.....	4 D3	Hotel Inglaterra.....	30 C3	Restaurante Prado 264.....	62 C3
Cibercafe Capitolio.....	5 C4	Hotel Lido.....	31 C2	ENTERTAINMENT ☑	
Etecsa.....	6 C4	Hotel Lincoln.....	32 B3	Cabaret Nacional.....	63 C3
Librería Luis Rogelio Noguera.....	7 B4	Hotel NH Parque Central.....	33 D3	Casa de la Trova.....	64 A2
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Hotel Plaza.....	35 D3	Cine Payret.....	66 D3
Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba.....	9 D4	Hotel Saratoga.....	36 D4	Cinecito.....	67 C3
Cárcel.....	10 D1	Hotel Sevilla.....	37 D2	Discoteca Ribera Azul.....	(see 29)
Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta.....	11 D1	Hotel Telegrafo.....	38 C3	El Palermo.....	68 C3
Centro Gallego.....	(see 69)	EATING ☑		Gran Teatro de La Habana.....	69 C3
Centro Hispano Americano de Cultura.....	12 D1	Almacenes Ultra.....	39 B5	Kid Chocolate.....	70 D4
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Fuente de la India.....	14 D4	Café La Logia.....	41 C4	Teatro América.....	72 B3
Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús.....	15 A5	Centro Andaluz.....	42 C2	Teatro Fausto.....	73 D2
Iglesia del Santo Angel Custodio.....	16 D2	Feria Los Fornos.....	43 C3	SHOPPING ☑	
Memorial a los Estudiantes de Medicina.....	17 D1	Flor de Lotu.....	44 A4	Area de Vendedores por Cuenta Propia.....	74 C5
Museo de la Revolución.....	18 D2	La Época.....	45 B3	El Bulevar.....	75 C3
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Colección de Arte Cubano).....	19 D2	Los Dos Dragones.....	46 B4	Galería La Acacia.....	76 C3
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Colección de Arte Universal).....	20 D3	Mercado Agropecuario Egido.....	47 D5	Galería Orígenes.....	(see 69)
Museo Nacional de la Música.....	21 D2	Paladar Amistad de Lanzarote.....	48 C3	La Manzana de Gómez.....	77 D3
Palacio de los Matrimonios.....	22 C3	Paladar Bellamar.....	49 C3	Real Fábrica de Tabacos La Corona.....	78 D2
Palacio Velasco (Spanish Embassy).....	23 D1	Paladar Doña Blanquita.....	50 C2	Variadades Galiano.....	79 B3
Pavillón Granma.....	24 D2	Paladar La Guarida.....	51 A3	TRANSPORT	
Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás.....	25 C4	Paladar Las Delicias de Consulado.....	52 C3	Blue Buses & Colectivos to Guanabo.....	80 D5
		Pastelería Francesa.....	53 C3	CicloBus.....	81 C4
		Prado y Neptuno.....	54 C3	Colectivo.....	82 D4
		Restaurant Tien-Tan.....	55 B4	El Orbe.....	(see 77)
		Restaurante Oasis.....	56 C2	M-1 bus stop.....	83 D3
		Restaurante Puerto de Sagua.....	57 D5	M-2 stop.....	84 C4
		Supermercado Isla de Cuba.....	58 C5	M-7 stop.....	85 C4
		Tres Chinitos.....	59 B4		

thing in the morning (when the church is deserted) gives the place an almost ethereal quality.

GRAN TEATRO & AROUND

On the northern side of the Capitolio is the ornate neo-baroque **Centro Gallego** (Paseo de Martí No 458) erected as a Galician social club between 1907 and 1914. The Centro was built around the existing Teatro Tacón, which opened in 1838 with five masked Carnival dances. This connection is the basis of claims by the present 2000-seat **Gran Teatro de La Habana** (☎ 861-3077; guided tours CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-6pm) that it's the oldest operating theater in the Western Hemisphere. Never mind the date details, this is an outrageously beautiful building inside and out. You can catch the National Ballet of Cuba and the State Opera in the Sala García Lorca here (see p136).

Just across the San Rafael pedestrian mall is **Hotel Inglaterra**, one of Habana's finest grand hotels. José Martí made a speech advocating independence at a banquet here in 1879, and much later US journalists covering the so-called Spanish-American War stayed at this hotel. Bar La Sevillana just inside the Inglaterra is a nice place for a break, as is the hotel's sidewalk terrace. **San Rafael**, a riot of ice-cream stalls, vintage clothing shops, plumbing supplies and more, is a fun detour where everything is sold in pesos.

Diminutive **Parque Central** across from the Inglaterra, was expanded to its present size after the city walls were knocked down in the late 19th century, and the marble **statue of José Martí** (1905) surrounded by 28 palm trees was the first statue of the poet to be erected in Cuba. Nowadays, this park is the turf of baseball fans who

linger, seemingly 24 hours a day, around the famous *esquina caliente* (literally, 'hot corner'; a place where baseball fans gather to discuss the game), debating in the most animated fashion about statistics, play-off predictions and the chances of US defector Liván Hernández coming home for Christmas.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES

Cuba's newly renovated Fine Arts Museum has a collection so extensive it needs two buildings to house it all.

The **Colección de Arte Universal** (☎ 863-9484; www.museonacional.cult.cu; cnr Agramonte & San Rafael; admission CUC\$5, children under 14 free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) features European and Latin American paintings and ancient Greek and Roman artifacts. It's a beautiful eclectic building (1886), though the permanent collection itself can't compare to others in larger cities. Good temporary exhibits do pass through, however.

Then there's the **Colección de Arte Cubano** (☎ 861-3858; Trocadero btwn Agramonte & Av de las Misiones; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). If you visit one fine art museum in Cuba, make it this world-class facility and set aside an entire afternoon. Split into three floors (all handicap accessible), the museum houses a sculpture garden, café and good museum shop on the ground floor. The 2nd floor is contemporary and modern art (look especially for works by Kcho, Raúl Martínez, Portocarrero and, of course, Wilfredo Lam), while the 3rd floor collects everything from the 16th century up to 1951. There's also a terrific art reference library here and a concert hall with varied events, including children's activities most weekends.

MUSEO DE LA REVOLUCIÓN

You can't miss the imposing **Pavillón Granma** facing the Colección de Arte Cubano. Since 1976, this has been the home to the 18m 'yacht' *Granma* that ushered Fidel Castro and 81 others from Tuxpán, Mexico, into Cuba and world history in 1956. It is encased in glass and heavily guarded 24 hours a day, presumably to stop anyone breaking in and making off for Florida in it. Other vehicles associated with the armed struggle surround the outdoor pavilion, which is accessible from the museum proper.

The **Museo de la Revolución** (☎ 862-4093; Refugio No 1; admission unguided/guided CUC\$4/6, cameras extra; ☎ 10am-5pm) is housed in the former Palacio Presidencial (1913-20), a signature of the Habana skyline. Tiffany of New York decorated the interior and you can gawp at the opulent decor as you wander around the museum's interesting array of exhibits. This palace was the site of an unsuccessful assassination attempt against Fulgencio Batista in March 1957 (see History, p44). The exhibits inside provide a exhaustive documentary and photographic account of the Cuban Revolution (from the guns shot to the bread sacks), and it's a must for anyone with a taste for history – allow yourself plenty of time. Labels are in English and Spanish and one English-speaking guide is available, which can really make the difference here. Start on the top floor and work down if you want to move in chronological order. In front of the building is an SAU-100 tank, used by Fidel Castro during the 1961 Battle of the Bay of Pigs, and a fragment of the former city wall.

PRADO (PASEO DE MARTÍ)

Technically it's called Paseo de Martí, but Cubans know and love it as **Prado** (to avoid confusion addresses always list it as Paseo de Martí). Construction of this stately boulevard began outside the city walls in 1770, and the work was completed in the mid-1830s during the term of Captain-General Miguel Tacón, who ruled from 1834 to 1838. He also constructed the original Parque Central. The figures of lions along the promenade were added in 1928. You'll see happy couples arriving to tie the knot in 1950s convertibles at the neo-Renaissance **Palacio de los Matrimonios** (Paseo de Martí No 302). For more sights along here, see the walking tour (p112).

ESCUELA NACIONAL DE BALLE

The **Escuela Nacional de Ballet** (cnr Paseo de Martí & Trocadero), Alicia Alonso's famous ballet school, is in an appropriately grand building on Prado and you can sometimes spot the well-honed physiques of the dedicated dancers rushing inside for a rehearsal.

EDIFICIO BACARDÍ

Finished in 1929 the magnificent Edificio Bacardí is a triumph of art-deco architec-

ture with a whole host of lavish finishes that somehow manage to blend the kitsch with the cool. Hemmed in by other buildings it's hard to get a full kaleidoscopic view of the structure from street level though the opulent bell-tower can be glimpsed from all over Habana. There's a bar in the lobby and for a few Convertibles you can travel up to the tower for a bird's-eye view.

IGLESIA DEL SANTO ANGEL CUSTODIO

This small but important church (☎ 861-0469; Compostela No 2; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 3-6pm Wed, Mass 7:15am Tue, Wed & Fri, 6pm Thu, Sat & Sun) was rebuilt in neo-Gothic style in 1871. Not only were both Felix Varela and José Martí baptized here (in 1788 and 1853 respectively), but Cirilo Villaverde also set the main scene of his novel *Cecilia Valdés* in this church. Don't miss the statue Cristo Yacente, (literally 'Christ lying down') titillating in his lacy net covering. You can hear the 1869 organ ringing out here during Mass.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE LA MÚSICA

Musicians especially will dig this museum (☎ 863-0052; Capdevila No 1; admission CUC\$2, cameras extra; ☎ 10am-5:45pm), with its extensive collection of Cuban and international instruments. Exhibited in the eclectic residence (1905) of a wealthy Habana merchant, the stringed room is particularly impressive. The museum shop sells recordings of Cuban music, and concerts take place in the music room a couple of nights a week (check the schedule at the museum entrance for events). Guides (in Spanish) are available for CUC\$1 extra.

There are two important monuments just across hectic Av de los Estudiantes from here. A surviving section of the colonial **Cárcel** (1838) where many Cuban patriots, including José Martí, were imprisoned is in **Parque de los Enamorados** (Lover's Park, which sees few for lack of shade). Beyond that is the **Memorial a los Estudiantes de Medicina**, a fragment of wall encased in marble where eight Cuban medical students chosen at random were shot by the Spanish in 1871 as a reprisal for allegedly desecrating the tomb of a Spanish journalist (in fact, they didn't do it). That beautiful art nouveau building behind, flying the Spanish flag, is the

old **Palacio Velasco** (1912), now the Spanish embassy, but on the skids with the Cuban government since they agreed to restrictive embargo-type legislation at the behest of the US in 2003.

Across the street is the picturesque **Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta**, designed by the Italian military engineer Giovanni Bautista Antonelli and built between 1589 and 1600. During the colonial era, a chain was stretched 250m to the castle of El Morro every night to close the harbor mouth to shipping. The castle's museum (admission CUC\$5; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) was renovated in 2002 and displays artifacts from sunken Spanish treasure fleets, a collection of model ships and information on the slave trade.

That monumental statue of a strapping man on a huge bronze horse is the memorial to Dominican General Máximo Gómez, number one in command during the wars of independence.

Vedado

Today Vedado is finally the suburb it was designed to be – a place to sleep, dine and go dancing – but really, the bulk of sites are in Habana Vieja and Centro Habana. The very name Vedado means 'forest reserve'; during the colonial era, felling trees was forbidden here and that's why it's so green. Habana's US community established itself in this area after 1898, and within a few decades Vedado was thick with high-rises, restaurants, nightclubs and other businesses.

Vedado boomed during the Batista era, and the East Coast Mafia of the US had a hand in it all. The Hotel Capri was a favorite haunt of Mafia bigwigs such as Lucky Luciano, Meyer Lansky, and American actor Gerge Raft; the same mob that was behind the Las Vegas-style Hotel Riviera. The cheap sex, liquor and gambling were big attractions for US tourists, and Batista's thugs made sure everything ran smoothly. The party ended in January 1959 when Fidel Castro and his *barbudas* (literally 'bearded ones,' the name given to Castro's rebel army) arrived from the Sierra Maestra and set up headquarters on the 22nd floor of the 25-story Havana Hilton, now called the Hotel Habana Libre (a permanent photo exhibit on the 2nd floor documents the transition).

Beatles fans will want to make a special trip to **Parque Lennon** (Calles 15 & 17 btwn Calles 6 & 8) where a hyper-realistic bronze of John lounges on a bench. Every December 8 there are vigils and music jams here remembering his murder. The statue was unveiled in December 2000 by Fidel Castro on the 20th anniversary of Lennon's death. Culturally speaking, it was one of the Cuban leaders more remarkable policy u-turns. The Beatles' music was banned in Cuba in the 1960s for being too 'decadent.' But following Lennon's strong social activism and opposition to US involvement in the Vietnam war he quickly became a hero among Cuban music fans and Castro has recently re-branded him as a 'revolutionary.' Tempting bait for would-be souvenir hunters, the bronze reincarnation of Lennon has suffered the ignominy of having his glasses stolen on a number of occasions and a guard has now been employed to keep a regular watch.

HOTEL NACIONAL

The neocolonial-style **Hotel Nacional** (☎ 873-3564; cnr Calles 0 & 21) was built in 1930. In August 1933 the US-backed dictator Gerardo Machado was overthrown during a popular uprising, and a month later army sergeant Fulgencio Batista seized power. Two months later, some 300 army officers displaced by Batista's coup sought refuge in the newly opened Hotel Nacional, where the US ambassador Sumner Wells was staying. Aware that the reins of power had changed hands, Ambassador Wells found urgent business elsewhere and Batista's troops attacked the officers, many of whom were shot after surrendering. The Nacional's tiled lobby, oversized chairs and aristocratic air capture the atmosphere of a bygone era and it's a nice place for a coffee or cocktail. Stroll straight through the lobby to the gardens behind the hotel. Several huge naval guns set up by the Spanish during the late 19th century still point out to sea from this cliff-top park where benches overlook the Malecón. If you're not down with crowds, this is a good perch for those frequent mass marches to the US Interests Section. The most recent demonstration revolved around the case of Luis Posada Carriles, a man suspected of bombing a Cubana Airlines flight in 1976

that killed 73 people. After the US refused to extradite American resident Carriles for trial in Venezuela (where he is alleged to have hatched the plot) in 2005, the Cuban government organized mass demos outside the US Interests Office and raised 73 huge black flags; one for each person that was killed in the crash. The Nacional is also headquarters for the Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (p457).

HOTEL HABANA LIBRE

Formerly the Havana Hotel it was commandeered by triumphant revolutionaries in 1959 and promptly renamed the **Habana Libre** (☎ 55 47 04; Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25); the art here, starting with the 670-sq-meter Venetian-tile mural by Amelia Peláez splashed across the front of the building, is worth a look. Upstairs is Alfredo Sosa Bravo's *Carro de la Revolución* made from 525 ceramic pieces, plus a rotating painting exhibit. The shopping arcade has a good liquor store and there are some great 1959 B&W photos of the all-conquering *barbudas* lolling around with their guns in the hotel's lobby.

EDIFICIO FOCSA

Unmissable on the Habana skyline the modernist Focsa building was built in 1954–56 in a record 28 months using pioneering computer technology. In 1999 was listed as one of the seven modern engineering wonders of Cuba. With 39 floors housing 373 apartments it was, on its completion in June 1956, the second largest concrete structure of its type in the world; constructed in its entirety without the use of cranes. Falling on hard times in the early '90s, the upper floors of the Focsa became nests for vultures and in 2000 an elevator cable snapped killing one person. Sparkling once more after a recent restoration project, this skyline-dominating Habana giant nowadays contains refurbished apartments and – in the shape of top-floor restaurant La Torre (p128) – one of the city's most celebrated eating establishments.

UNIVERSIDAD DE LA HABANA

Every great city deserves a great university and the **Universidad de La Habana** (cnr Neptuno & San Lázaro) is just that (it even hosted anti-war protests when the US invaded Iraq in

2003). Before climbing the monumental stairs toward alma mater, head downhill to check out the **Monumento a Julio Antonio Mella** (cnr Neptuno & San Lázaro), a monument to the student leader who founded the first Cuban Communist Party in 1925. In 1929 the dictator Machado had Mella assassinated in Mexico City. More interesting than the monument, however, are the black and white **Mella portraits** permanently mounted in the wall in the little park across San Lázaro.

The university was founded by Dominican monks in 1728 and secularized in 1842. The present neoclassical complex dates from the second quarter of the 20th century, and today some 30,000 students (2000 of them foreigners), taught by 1700 professors, take courses in the social sciences and humanities, natural sciences, mathematics and economics.

Go up the stairway and through the monumental gateway into Plaza Ignacio Agramonte, the university's central square. In front of you is the **biblioteca** (library) and to your left the **Edificio Felipe Poey**, with two **museums** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am–noon & 1–4pm Mon–Fri). Downstairs, the **Museo de Historia Natural** is the oldest museum in Cuba, founded in 1874 by the Royal Academy of Medical, Physical and Natural Sciences. Many of the stuffed specimens of Cuban flora and fauna here date from the 19th century. Upstairs is the **Museo Antropológico Montané**, established in 1903, with a rich collection of pre-Columbian Indian artifacts. The most important objects are the wooden 10th-century **Ídolo del Tabaco**, discovered in Guantánamo Province, and the stone **Ídolo de Bayamo**, but the mummies are also cool. Keep this building on your left, and the next building on your left is the **Anfiteatro Enrique José Varona**; films are screened here during the Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano.

Go down through the park on the north side of the Edificio Felipe Poey and exit the university compound via a small gate to reach the **Museo Napoleónico** (☎ 79 14 60; San Miguel No 1159; unguided/guided CUC\$3/6; ☎ 10am–5:30pm Mon–Sat), containing 7000 objects associated with Napoleon Bonaparte, including his 1821 death mask. The 10,000-seat **Estadio Universitario Juan Abrahantes**, where students

play soccer and baseball, is just up the hill from this museum.

MUSEUMS

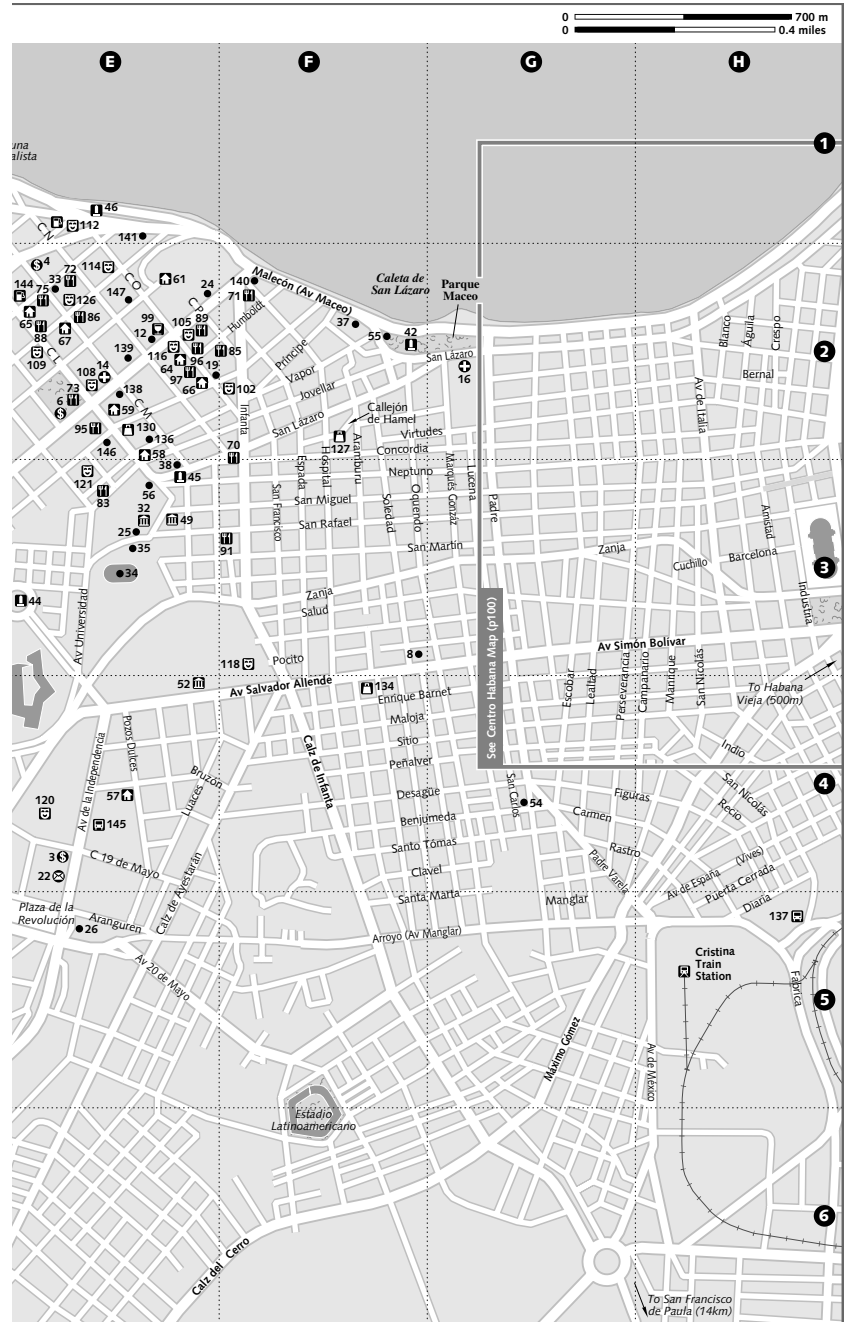
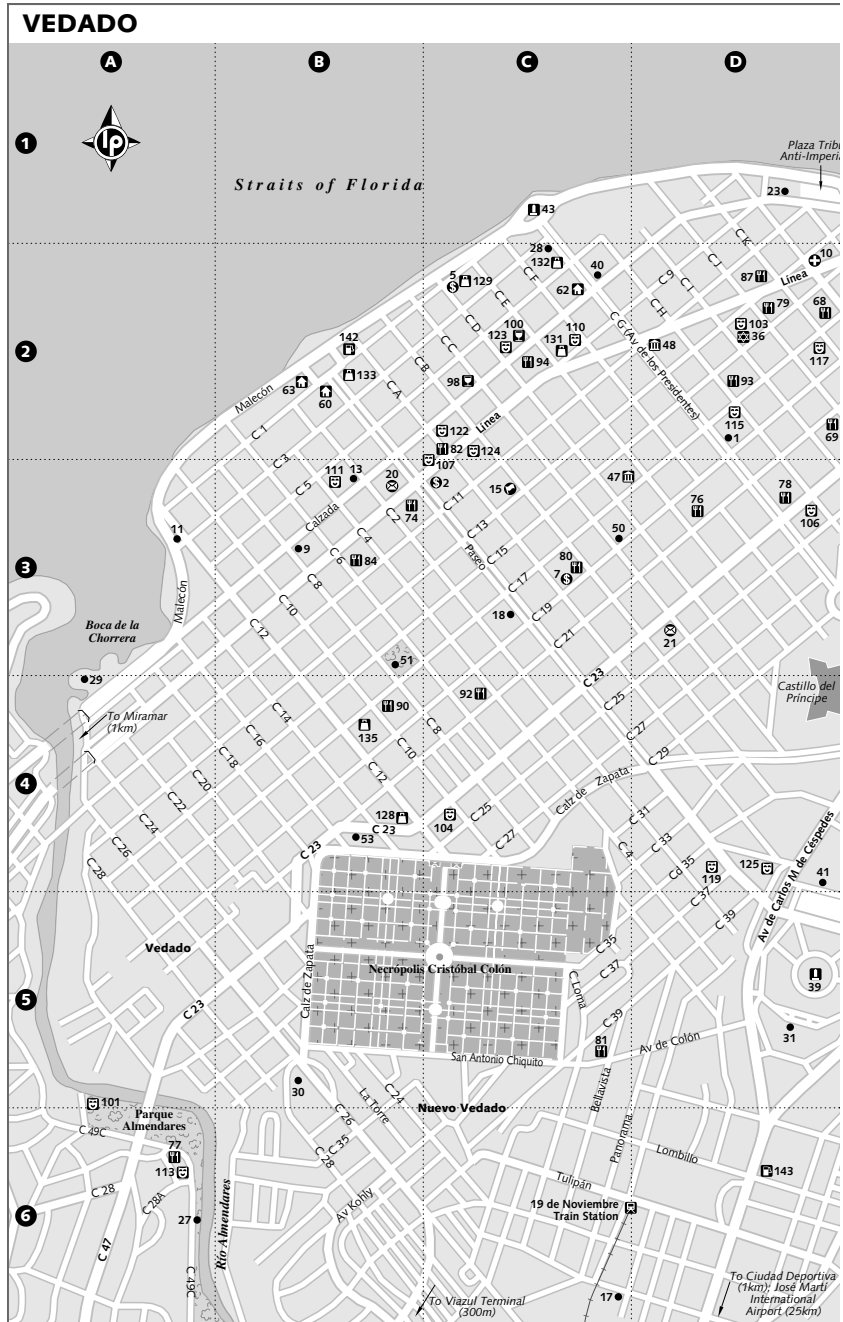
Two museums further afield in Vedado that are worthwhile if you're in the neighborhood are the **Museo de Artes Decorativas** (☎ 830-9848; Calle 17 No 502 btwn Calles D & E; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 11am–7pm Tue–Sat), with its fancy rococo, oriental and art-deco baubles and the **Museo de Danza** (☎ 831-2198; Línea No 365; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 11am–6:30pm Tue–Sat), which collects objects from Cuba's rich dance history, including some personal effects of Alicia Alonso.

PARQUE ALMENDARES

Running along the banks of the city's Río Almendares, below the bridge on Calle 23, is this wonderful oasis of green and fresh air in the heart of chaotic Habana. The park was restored in 2003 and they did a beautiful job: benches now line the river promenade, plants grow profusely and there are many facilities here, including an antiquated **miniature golf course**, the **Anfiteatro Parque Almendares** (see Entertainment, p134) and a **playground**. There are several good places to eat. Take a 20-minute stroll through old-growth trees in the **Bosque de la Habana** and you'll feel transported (take a friend though: this is a very isolated spot and is considered unsafe by locals).

Plaza de la Revolución Area PLAZA DE LA REVOLUCIÓN

Those tingles you feel may be the emotion of being in Cuba's most important public space or maybe it's just the oppressive heat (for which the square is famous). Predating the 1959 triumph, the **Plaza de la Revolución** was once called Plaza de la República. Although this gigantic square has come to symbolize the Cuban Revolution due to the huge political rallies held here in the '60s, most buildings date from the Batista era. On important occasions Castro and others (including the Pope) have addressed up to 1.2-million Cubans and supporters from the podium in front of the star-shaped, 142m-high **Memorial José Martí** (☎ 59 23 47; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 9:30am–5pm Mon–Sat). Head here on May 1 or July 26 at 7am if you want to experience it yourself (most hotels offer excursions). The 17m marble Martí statue



INFORMATION	Librería Rayuela.....(see 28)	Monumento a Julio Antonio Mella..... 45 E3
Alliance Française.....1 D2	Post Office..... 20 B3	Monumento a las Víctimas del Maine..... 46 E1
Banco de Crédito Comercio.....(see 24)	Post Office..... 21 D3	Museo Antropológico Montañé.....(see 32)
Banco de Crédito y Comercio..... 2 C3	Post Office..... 22 E4	Museo de Artes Decorativas..... 47 C3
Banco de Crédito y Comercio..... 3 E4	Sol y Son.....(see 24)	Museo de Danza..... 48 D2
Banco Financiero Internacional.....(see 134)	US Interests Section..... 23 D1	Museo de Historia Natural.....(see 32)
Banco Financiero Internacional.....(see 59)	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Museo Napoleónico..... 49 E3
Banco Metropolitano..... 4 E2	Airline Building..... 24 E2	Paradiso..... 50 C3
Biblioteca José A Echevarría.....(see 28)	Anfiteatro Enrique José Varona..... 25 E3	Parque Lennon..... 51 B3
Buró de Convenciones de Cuba.....(see 126)	Biblioteca Nacional José Martí..... 26 E5	Quinta de los Molinos..... 52 E4
Cadeca..... 5 C2	Bosque de la Habana..... 27 A6	Real Fábrica de Tabacos H Upmann..... 53 B4
Cadeca..... 6 E2	Casa de las Américas..... 28 C2	Romeo y Julieta Cigar Factory..... 54 G4
Cadeca..... 7 C3	Castillo de Santa Dorotea de Luna de Chorrera..... 29 A4	Salvador's Studio.....(see 127)
Casa de la Cultura Centro Habana..... 8 F3	Cementerio Chino..... 30 B5	Torreón de San Lázaro..... 55 F2
Casa de la Cultura de Plaza Centro Oftalmológico Camilo Cienfuegos..... 10 D2	Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba..... 31 D5	Universidad de La Habana..... 56 E3
Cine 23 y 12.....(see 128)	Edificio Felipe Poey..... 32 E3	SLEEPING
Cubamar..... 11 A3	Edificio Focsa..... 33 E2	Hotel Bruzón..... 57 E4
Cubanaacán..... 12 E2	Estadio Universitario Juan Abrahantes..... 34 E3	Hotel Colina..... 58 E2
DHL..... 13 B3	Estadio Universitario Juan Abrahantes..... 35 E3	Hotel Habana Libre..... 59 E2
DHL.....(see 61)	Gran Sinagoga Bet Shalom..... 36 D2	Hotel Meliá Cohiba..... 60 B2
Farmacia Homopática..... 14 E2	Holá Ola..... 37 F2	Hotel Nacional..... 61 E2
Farmacia.....(see 59)	Mella portraits..... 38 E3	Hotel Presidente..... 62 C2
German Embassy..... 15 C3	Memorial José Martí..... 39 D5	Hotel Riviera..... 63 B2
Havanatur.....(see 133)	Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores..... 40 C2	Hotel St John's..... 64 E2
Hospital Nacional Hermanos Ameijeiras..... 16 G2	Ministerio del Interior..... 41 D4	Hotel Universitario..... 65 E2
Inmigración..... 17 C6	Monumento a Antonio Maceo..... 42 F2	Hotel Vedado..... 66 E2
Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos..... 18 C3	Monumento a Calixto García..... 43 C1	Hotel Victoria..... 67 E2
Librería Alma Mater.....(see 56)	Monumento a José Miguel Gómez..... 44 E3	EATING
Librería Centenario del Apóstol..... 19 E2		Agropecuaria 17 & K..... 68 D2

in front is by Juan José Sicre. In 1996 the memorial was renovated; you can visit the museum dedicated to Martí at the memorial's base, and for CUC\$2 more, take the elevator to the enclosed 129m-level viewpoint – the highest structure in Cuba.

Fidel Castro's office is located in the long building behind the memorial, the heavily guarded **Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba**, once the Ministry of Justice (1958). The **Ministerio del Interior** on the northern side of the square is easily identifiable for its huge Ernesto 'Che' Guevara mural and the slogan 'Hasta la Victoria Siempre' (Always toward Victory!). West of it is the **Teatro Nacional de Cuba** (see p137).

On the western side of the Plaza de la Revolución is the 1957 **Biblioteca Nacional José Martí** (admission free; ☎ 8am-9:45pm Mon-Sat). There's a photo exhibit in the lobby and downstairs is the children's library, with events and kid's art exhibits.

Quinta de los Molinos (cnr Av Salvador Allende & Luaces) is a former residence of General

Máximo Gómez and now a museum, set in the university's former botanical gardens. There's a shady park that Cubans will warn you away from. The Quinta de los Molinos is important as the site of the Asociación Hermanos Saiz, youth arm of Uneac. Concerts held at La Madriguera (lots of rock and rap) are notoriously fun (see p134). The museum was closed for renovations at the time of writing.

NECRÓPOLIS CRISTÓBAL COLÓN

A municipality of granite, marble and loved ones, this is Cuba's most important **cemetery** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 7am-5pm). It's even laid out like a metropolis of the dearly departed, with numbered streets and avenues on a rectangular grid. The Necrópolis accommodates the graves of just under a million people interred here between 1868 and today (unfortunately, they are disinterring people daily because they've run out of room). Many of the graves have impressive marble tombstones (ask to be shown the *dominó* grave),

Bim Bom..... 71 F2	ENTERTAINMENT	Teatro Mella..... 124 C2
CafeTV..... 72 E2	Anfiteatro Parque Almadares..... 101 A5	Teatro Nacional de Cuba..... 125 D4
Coppelia..... 73 E2	Cabaret Las Vegas..... 102 F2	Teatro Nacional de Guíñol..... 126 E2
Decameron..... 74 B3	Cabaret Parísien.....(see 61)	Uneac.....(see 115)
El Conejito..... 75 E2	Cabaret Turquino.....(see 59)	SHOPPING
El Gringo Viejo..... 76 D3	Cafe Cantante.....(see 125)	ARTex.....(see 108)
El Lugar..... 77 A6	Café Teatro Brecht..... 103 D2	Callejón de Hamel..... 127 F2
G-Café..... 78 D3	Cine Charles Chaplin..... 104 C4	Centro de Arte 23 y 12..... 128 B4
La Torre.....(see 33)	Cine La Rampa..... 105 E2	Feria de la Artesanía..... 129 C2
Le Chansonnier..... 79 D2	Cine Riviera..... 106 D3	Galería Ciudades del Mundo..... 130 E2
Mercado Agropecuario..... 80 C3	Mesón de la Chorrera.....(see 29)	Galería Habana..... 131 C2
Organopónico Plaza..... 81 C5	Pain de Paris..... 82 C2	Galería Haydee Santamaría..... 132 C2
Pain de Paris.....(see 19)	Paladar Aries..... 83 E3	Galerías de Paseo..... 133 B2
Paladar Aries..... 83 E3	Paladar El Helecho..... 84 B3	Photo Service.....(see 133)
Paladar El Hurón Azul..... 85 F2	Paladar Escorpión.....(see 75)	Photo Service.....(see 99)
Paladar Escorpión.....(see 75)	Paladar Los Amigos..... 86 E2	Plaza Carlos III..... 134 F4
Paladar Monopoly..... 87 D2	Paladar Nerei..... 88 E2	Registro Nacional de Bienes Culturales..... 135 B4
Paladar Nerei..... 88 E2	Palmares Centro..... 89 E2	TRANSPORT
Pan.com..... 90 B4	Peso pizza..... 91 F3	Aerocaribbean.....(see 24)
Peso pizza..... 91 F3	Peso Stalls..... 92 C4	Aerotaxi..... 136 E2
Peso Stalls..... 92 C4	Restaurant Vegetariano Carmelo..... 94 C2	Bus 400 to Guanabo..... 137 H5
Restaurant Vegetariano Carmelo..... 94 C2	Restaurante Bulerías..... 95 E2	Cubana Airlines.....(see 24)
Restaurante Wakamba..... 96 E2	Restaurante Meridiano.....(see 133)	Cubatur..... 138 E2
Supermercado Meridiano.....(see 133)	Trattoria Maraka's..... 97 E2	Havanautos..... 139 E2
Trattoria Maraka's..... 97 E2	DRINKING	Micar..... 140 F2
DRINKING	Bar-Club Imágenes..... 98 C2	Micar.....(see 133)
Bar-Club Imágenes..... 98 C2	Centro de Prensa Internacional..... 99 E2	Rex Rent a Car..... 141 E1
Centro de Prensa Internacional..... 99 E2	Opus Bar..... 100 C2	Servi-Cupet Gas Station..... 142 B2
Opus Bar..... 100 C2		Servi-Cupet Gas Station..... 143 D6
		Servi-Cupet Petrol Station..... 144 E2
		Terminal de Ómnibus..... 145 E4
		Transtur..... 146 E2
		Transtur..... 147 E2

making this the largest sculpture park in the country. Silvio Rodríguez filmed his latest video *Cita con Angeles* among all the cherubs here. A guidebook with a detailed map (CUC\$5) is for sale at the entrance.

After entering the neo-Romanesque **northern gateway** (1870), there's the tomb of independence leader **General Máximo Gómez** (1905) on the right (look for the bronze face in a circular medallion). Further along past the first circle, and also on the right, are the **monument to the firefighters** (1890); the **Familia Falla Bonet mausoleum** (of artistic interest); and the **Capilla Central** (1886) in the center of the cemetery. Just northeast in this chapel is the tomb of **Señora Amelia Goyri** (cnr Calles 1 & F), better known as *La Milagrosa* (the miraculous one) who died while giving birth on May 3, 1901. The marble figure of a woman with a large cross and a baby in her arms is easy to find, due to the many flowers piled on the tomb and the local devotees in attendance. For many years after her death, her heartbroken hus-

band visited the grave several times a day. He always knocked with one of four iron rings on the burial vault and walked away backwards so he could see her for as long as possible. When the bodies were exhumed some years later Amelia's body was uncorrupted (a sign of sanctity in the Catholic faith) and the baby, who had been buried at its mother's feet, was – allegedly – found in her arms. As a result *La Milagrosa* became the focus of a huge spiritual cult in Cuba and thousands of people come here annually with gifts in the hope of fulfilling dreams or solving problems. In keeping with tradition, pilgrims knock with the iron ring on the vault and walk away backwards when they leave.

Also worth seeking out is the tomb of Orthodox Party leader **Eduardo Chibás** (Calle 8 btwn Calles E & F). During the 1940s and early '50s Chibás was a relentless crusader against political corruption, and as a personal protest he committed suicide during a radio broadcast in 1951. At his burial ceremony a

CIGAR FACTORY TOURS

There are two factories presently allowing tours in Habana, and the programs are roughly the same. Visitors check out the ground floor where the leaves are unbundled and sorted before proceeding to the upper floors to watch the tobacco get rolled, pressed, adorned with a band, and boxed. Remember, these are factories where people toil (sometimes for 12 hours a day or more) for around 200 pesos a month, and some visitors find they smack of a human zoo. Still, if you have even a passing interest in tobacco, Cuban work environments or economies of scale, you'll enjoy one of the CUC\$10, 45-minute tours held Monday to Friday at the following factories:

Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás (Map p100; ☎ 862-0086; Industria No 520 btwn Barcelona & Dragones; ☒ tours every 15 min btwn 9:30am-11am & 12:30-3pm) The tobacco shop (open 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday) and smoking lounge are bonuses here. This is one of Habana's oldest cigar factories (1845).

Real Fábrica de Tabacos H Upmann (Map pp106-7; ☎ 862-0081; Calle 23 btwn Calles 16 & 14; ☒ tours 9:30am-2:30pm Mon-Fri) Founded in 1844 and housed in an impressive neoclassical building, Romeo y Julieta, Montecristo and Cohibas are rolled here.

At the time of writing the **Romeo y Julieta** (Map pp106-7; Padre Varela No 852) and the **Real Fábrica de Tabacos La Corona** (Map p100; Calle Agramonte No 106 btwn Colón & Refugio) factories were closed to the public, though the shop and smoking rooms were still open.

young Orthodox activist named Fidel Castro jumped atop Chibás' grave and made a fiery speech denouncing the old establishment – the political debut of the most influential Cuban of the 20th century.

A bronze **plaque** (cnr Calles 14 & 23), one block from the cemetery entrance, marks the spot where Fidel proclaimed the socialist nature of the Cuban Revolution on April 16, 1961, at a funeral service for those killed during a counter-revolutionary raid on a Habana air base the previous day.

For something completely different, exit the west gate of the cemetery and walk south for three blocks to the **Cementerio Chino** (cnr Av 26 & Zapata; ☒ 6am-6pm).

Along the Malecón

Habana has become synonymous with the Malecón, its 8km seawall. Constructed during the American administration in 1901, it snakes along the coast from the Castillo de la Punta in Habana Vieja to Castillo de Santa Dorotea de Luna de Chorrera, another castle at the mouth of the Río Almendares. Here two one-way tunnels dive under the river, and the main thoroughfare continues through Miramar as Av 5, eventually becoming the Autopista (freeway) to Mariel. In the rougher months, waves splash high over the wall, soaking cars and strollers alike. Half-eaten by the salt spray, the pastiche of architectural gems, restored or collapsing, backing the Malecón

is enchanting. A new project erecting old-fashioned-style street lamps makes it even more attractive at night, when lovers paste themselves to the wall, wandering *trovadores* sing for tips, and there's always a bottle of rum being passed your way. Hustlers here can be fierce: tell them directly and unequivocally that you're hanging out on your own, and they'll soon go away. The Malecón was severely lashed by Hurricane Wilma in October 2005. Huge waves rose to 3m above the Morro lighthouse, chunks were taken out of the battered sea wall, and more than 250 people had to be evacuated by amphibious vehicles.

The 24-story **Hospital Nacional Hermanos Ameijeiras** (1980), the highest building in Centro Habana (but not in Habana – that would be the Focsa), dominates this area. Some of the clinics specialize in treating foreigners (see Medical Services, p91). Opposite the hospital is the **Monumento a Antonio Maceo** (1916), the mulatto general who cut a blazing trail across the entire length of Cuba during the First War of Independence. The nearby 18th-century **Torreón de San Lázaro** was built as a watchtower by the Spanish.

West beyond Hotel Nacional is a stretch of the Malecón known as Av Washington because the old US Embassy was here. In the center of the boulevard is the **Monumento a las Víctimas del Maine** (1926), which had an American eagle on top until the 1959 revolution. The current inscription on the side of

the monument alludes to the theory that US agents deliberately blew up their own ship to create a pretext for declaring war on Spain: '*A las víctimas de el Maine que fueron sacrificados por la voracidad imperialista en su afán de apoderarse de la Isla de Cuba*' (To the victims of the *Maine* who were sacrificed by voracious imperialism in its desire to gain control of the island of Cuba). The modern seven-story building with high security fencing at the western end of this open space is the **US Interests Office** first set up by the Carter administration in the late 1970s. Surrounded by hysterical graffiti that links Bush to all kinds of monsters including Hitler, the building is the site of some of the worst tit-for-tat finger wagging on the island. Facing the office front is the Plaza Tribuna Anti-Imperialista, built during the Elián González affair to host major in-your-face protests (earning it the local nickname *protestódromo*). Concerts, protests and marches – some one million strong – are still held here.

Built in 1959 another impressive memorial is the **Monumento a Calixto García** (cnr Malecón & Calle G) to the valiant Cuban general who US military leaders in Santiago de Cuba prevented from attending the Spanish surrender in 1898. Twenty-four bronze plaques around the equestrian statue provide a history of García's 30-year struggle for Cuban independence. On Calle G just behind the monument is the **Casa de las Américas** (☎ 55 27 06; Calle G btwn Calles 3 & 5; admission CUC\$2; ☒ 10am-4:40pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), a major cultural institution set up by Moncada survivor Haydee Santamaría in 1959 sponsoring literary and artistic seminars, concerts and exhibitions. Inside there's an art gallery and a bookshop.

Many busts and statues line Calle G (Av de los Presidentes). In the middle of the avenue is a former monument to Cuba's first president – and ex-friend of José Martí – Tomás Estrada Palma, who is now considered a US puppet. His statue was toppled and all that remains of the monument are his shoes. On the other side of Calle G is the neobaroque **Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores**.

A large **feria de la artesanía** (craft fair) with handicrafts and used books is at the corner of Malecón and Calle D.

Cuba has three synagogues servicing a Jewish population of approximately 1:500. The main community center and library is at the **Gran Sinagoga Bet Shalom** (Calle I btwn 13 &

15) where the friendly staff would be happy to tell interested visitors about the fascinating history of the Jews in Cuba.

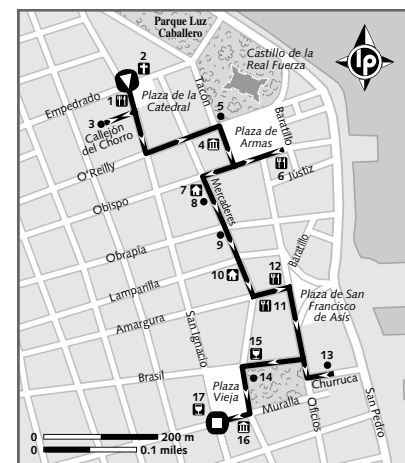
HABANA VIEJA WALKING TOUR

It's unlikely you'll get to both the Habana Vieja and Centro Habana walking tours in a day, unless you hop some transport halfway through. You can connect with a horse carriage (CUC\$10 per hour) on Mercaderes just off Obispo, a coco-taxi anywhere around Plaza de San Francisco de Asís (horse carriages hang out here too) or a bici-taxi near the Estación Central de Ferrocarriles (Central Station).

Plaza de la Catedral is a moveable feast and you can espy most of what's going on from the lush **Restaurante El Patio** (1; p126), before heading into the **Catedral de San Cristóbal de la Habana** (2; p93). Track southwest next, past the resident fortune teller and the brightly clad ladies in polka-dot dresses (who'll plant a kiss on your cheek for a ludicrous tip), and pop into the alleyway on the right housing the **Taller Experimental de Gráfica** (3; p114). Here, in what must be Habana's funkier art gallery, Pink Floyd meets Jackson Pollack

WALK FACTS

Start Restaurante El Patio
Finish Taberna de la Muralla
Distance 1.3km
Duration Three hours



meets Wilfredo Lam with a bit of Picasso thrown in for good measure. Use your excellent map-reading skills to deliver you in front of the gargantuan **Museo de la Ciudad** (4; p96) on the western side of Plaza de Armas before the crowds arrive. If they've already beaten you to it, take a break outside in the breezy plaza, a bibliophile's Nirvana, with an outdoor book fair, if it's Wednesday, or if it's not pop into one of Habana's top bookshops in the **Palacio del Segundo Cabo** (5; p96). You might skip the stuffed animals at the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural and head straight to the 5th-floor terrace bar at **Restaurante Mirador de la Bahía** (6; p125), where the burgers are good and the views even better.

Breaking out of the plaza head south on Obispo past some of Habana's oldest surviving houses to the corner of Mercaderes. The lurid pink pastel building on the left is the **Hotel Ambos Mundos** (7; p118), where Ernest Hemingway stayed off and on during the 1930s. You can visit room 511 (admission CUC\$2; open 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday) where he started writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or enjoy a few romantic tunes from the resident pianist in the lobby downstairs. A few doors south on Mercaderes is the **Maqueta de la Habana Vieja** (8; p96), a darling scale model of everyone's favorite Unesco World Heritage site. Continuing straight to the intersection with Obrapia at the next corner, drop into **Habana 1791** (9; p139) where floral fragrances are made and mixed by hand (you can see all the petals drying in the laboratory out back.) These make a great souvenir for Mom or Aunt Vera.

Crossing *Lamparilla* you'll quickly fall upon the **Hostal Condes de Villanueva** (10; p119) an impressively restored Habaguanex hotel with a tranquil inner courtyard and a first-class on-site cigar shop (great presents for Uncle Charlie here). Walk past the quirky **Museo del Chocolate** (11; p115) – situated ironically on Calle Amargura which translates as 'bitterness' street – and you're either ill or in serious denial. It's a predictably busy melee inside, but you'll get served eventually and when it comes, the hot chocolate with dip-in biscuits is...well – words cannot describe! Jog left down Amargura as the sugar high kicks in and you'll hit the warm sea breezes of Plaza de San Francisco

de Asís. The western side of the plaza hosts several art galleries (see p139), some with little gardens out back if you need a break. Or splurge with a cappuccino at **Café del Oriente** (12; p126).

Train lovers will want to detour half a block south on Oficios and turn left on Churruga to check out the **Coche Mambí** (13; admission free; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sat), a 1900 train car built in the US and brought to Cuba in 1912. Put into service as the 'Presidential Car,' it's a palace on wheels, with a formal dining room, louvered wooden windows and, back in its heyday, fans cooling the car with dry ice.

Otherwise, turn right at the corner of Oficios and Brasil and you're headed toward Plaza Vieja. This plaza is captivating: you'll get some of the city's best views from atop the tower housing the **cámara oscura** (14; p97) on the northeastern corner. Peek quickly into **Café Taberna** (15; p132), a temple to the late Beny Moré and other assorted mambo kings before nosing through the card collection at **Museo de Naipes** (16; p98), on the square's southeastern corner. Finish the tour with a glass of Habana's best beer brewed on the premises at **Taberna de la Muralla** (17; p132). There's an outdoor grill here too if you're feeling peckish.

If you want to say goodbye to tourist-brochure Habana Vieja and hello to the real world, continue west on Muralla for one block and then south on Cuba. Here ceilings fall without warning and power outages, water shortages and garbage-strewn streets are the norm. This is one of the roughest parts of the city, so be on your toes. Everyone will see at a glance that you're a tourist, but try not to look like an easy mark. If in doubt, head back toward the Plaza de Armas. Avoid these areas after dark. If you want to check out some churches and link up with the Centro Habana Walking Tour, continue six blocks south on Cuba and then go left on Leonor Pérez for five blocks.

CENTRO HABANA WALKING TOUR

While this route might not look far on paper, you will need to put aside at least four hours for this culture-packed walking tour. Out here on the cusp of the Habana Vieja and Centro Habana there are too many captivating distractions – too many

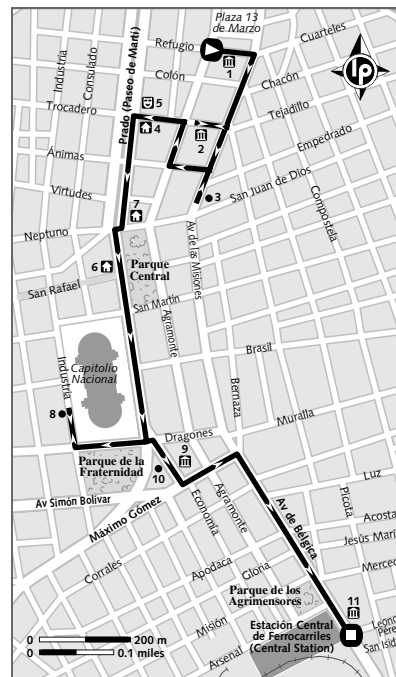
WALK FACTS

Start Museo de la Revolución

Finish Museo Casa-Natal de José Martí

Distance 2.5km

Duration Four hours



intriguing side streets to wander down – to set aside only a brief time period. Kick off in the heart of matters, at the **Museo de la Revolución** (1; p102) and **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes** (2; p102). Both deserve two hours minimum so, unless you've brought a sleeping bag, toss a coin and take your pick – history or art? Head south a block and a half next to the **Edificio Bacardi** (3; p102), one of Habana's most striking buildings – garnished with granite, Capellania limestone, and multicolored bricks – and considered by many to be one of the best examples of art-deco architecture in the world.

Retrace your steps for a few meters and head left on Animas, right onto Agramonte and then left into Trocadero. Glittering before you is the sumptuous **Hotel Sevilla** (4;

p119) where Enrico Caruso stayed in 1920 and where the Mary Pickford cocktail was first concocted (rum, pineapple juice and grenadine). Built in 1908 the Prado end of the lobby has a wall of interesting historic photos. A few steps more and you're on the Prado, that leafy urban glade where tykes skate by and sinuous youths from the **Escuela Nacional de Ballet** (5; p102) nurse sore muscles.

The hustlers can be fierce along here, so you'll want to make your way south at some point to Parque Central to admire the José Martí statue (first among thousands!) and catch the latest baseball gossip at the *esquina caliente*. A 360-degree turn reveals the baroque Gran Teatro, the royal blue Hotel Telégrafo and a sneak preview of the Capitolio. Ignore these for the moment and consider lunch or a drink, either curbside at the stately **Hotel Inglaterra** (6; p121) or on the exquisite rooftop bar at the **Hotel NH Parque Central** (7; p121). The latter is strictly five-star stuff, so slackers beware.

If you want to get off the tourist track, head up Neptuno, alongside the Hotel Telégrafo. Within a block you'll be into the bombed-out shell of Centro Habana. Calle Consulado's a baseball diamond during the day with tomorrow's Liván Hernándezes sprinting to make it past first base; watch out for the holes here, and the rotting garbage and the house keys that sometimes get flung out of top floor windows.

If you get out unscathed home in on the Capitolio Nacional, Habana's Washington wannabe built by Yanqui sycophant President Gerardo Machado y Morales in 1929. Photographers might want to stroll across the road to the famous Jurassic opposite where long-suffering colectivo taxi drivers rest their asthmatic Buicks and Olsmobiles in between fares. Keep walking south on Prado and turn right on Dragones just at the edge of the Capitolio for an informative cigar tour at the **Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás** (8; p99) or continue straight past the **Fuente de la India** (9; p99) sculpture at the crazy roundabout (cross carefully here) to the **Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba** (10; p99) with their fascinating well-laid-out museum.

Jog left on Máximo Gómez for two blocks and then turn right onto chaotic Av de Bélgica and into the 'real' Habana, where peso cafeterias and one of the city's biggest markets provide cheap eating opportunities.

If you don't feel like walking the five long blocks south to the **Museo-Casa Natal de José Martí** (11; p99), flag down a bici-taxi here.

COURSES

Aside from Spanish-language courses (see the boxed text, opposite), Habana offers a wide number of learning activities for aspiring students.

Dance

The easiest way to take a dance class is at the **Museo del Ron** (Map p94; ☎ 861-8051; San Pedro No 262) which offers on-the-spot lessons Monday to Friday at 9am, for CUC\$10 for the first two hours; it always gets good reports. Another option is the **Teatro América** (Map p100; ☎ 862-5416; Av de Italia No 253 btwn Concordia & Neptuno, Centro Habana) next to the Casa de la Música which can fix you up with both a class and a partner for CUC\$8 per hour under the eye of Artistic Director Jorge Samá.

The **Conjunto Folklórico Nacional** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 7-830-3060; Calle 4 No 103 btwn Calzada & Calle 5, Vedado) teaches highly recommended classes in *son*, salsa, rumba, mambo and more. Classes start on the first Monday in January and July, and cost in the vicinity of CUC\$400 to CUC\$500, for a 15-day course. An admission test places students in classes of four different levels.

Culture

Centro Hispano Americano de Cultura (Map p100; ☎ 860-6282; Malecón No 17 btwn Prado & Capdevila;

☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) has all kinds of facilities including a library, cinema, Internet café and concert venue. Pick up their excellent monthly brochure and ask about the literature courses. Another place worth approaching is **Paradiso** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-9538; fax 33 39 21; Calle 19 No 560, Vedado) a cultural agency that can arrange courses on history, architecture, music, theater, dance and more.

Yoga

Yoga classes are offered in the garden of the **Museo de Artes Decorativas** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 830-9848; Calle 17 No 502 btwn Calles D & E). Check at the museum for the next session. You may be able to drop in on classes held at the **Teatro Nacional** (Map pp106-7; cnr Paseo & Calle 39). Look for the class schedule by the box office.

Music

Cubans are aficionados of Flamenco and you can take dance classes or even pursue the possibility of a few guitar lessons by inquiring at the **Centro Andaluz** (Map p100; ☎ 863-6745; Paseo de Martí No 104 btwn Genios & Refugio).

Art

The **Taller Experimental de Gráfica** (Map p94; ☎ 7-862-0979; fax 7-824-0391; Callejón del Chorro No 6; Plaza de la Catedral, Habana) offers classes in the art of engraving. Individualized instruction lasts one month, during which the student creates an engraving with 15 copies; longer classes can be arranged. The cost is around CUC\$250.

SCAMS

Well documented *jinetero* (tout) problem aside, Habana is a remarkably safe city – particularly when compared with other Latin American capitals. Stroll through the atmospheric backstreets of Centro Habana or Habana Vieja of an evening and your biggest worry is likely to be a badly pitched baseball or a flailing line of household washing.

But innocents beware. Scams do exist, particularly in the more touristy areas where well-practiced hustlers lurk outside the big hotels waiting to prey on unsuspecting foreign visitors.

One popular trick is for young men in the street to offer to change foreign currency into Cuban Convertibles at very favorable rates. Accept this at your peril. The money that you will be given is *moneda nacional* or Cuban pesos, visually similar to Convertibles, but worth approximately one-twenty-fifth of the value when you take them into a shop.

A second scam is the illicit sale of cheap cigars usually perpetuated by hissing street salesmen around Centro Habana and Habana Vieja. It is best to politely ignore these characters. Any bartering is not worth the bother. Cigars sold on the street are almost always sub-standard – something akin to substituting an expensive French wine with cheap white vinegar. Instead, buy your cigars direct from the factory or visit one of the numerous Casas del Habana that are scattered throughout the city.

TALK CUBAN ASERE

For aspiring language students, uncovering the nuances of Cuban Spanish is rather like learning English from a Glaswegian. There's plenty of lewd and colorful language, but it doesn't always correspond to the phrasebook. Here's a list of some of the more accessible institutions that offer Spanish study in Habana:

- The first port of call for foreign language students is **Universidad de la Habana** (Map pp106-7; Edificio Varona, 2nd fl, Calle J No 556) which offers Spanish courses 12 months a year, beginning on the first Monday of each month. Costs start at CUC\$100 for 20 hours (one week), including textbooks, and cover all levels from beginners to advanced. You must first sit a placement test to determine your level. Aspiring candidates can sign up in person at the university or reserve beforehand via e-mail or phone (☎ 832-4245; 831-3751; dpg@uh.cu). You can also check out the UniversiTUR website (www.universitur.com).
- Other places to check out Spanish courses include **Unecac** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-4551; cnr Calles 17 & H, Vedado) and **Paradiso** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-9538; Calle 19 No 560).
- Private lessons can be arranged by asking around locally – try your casa particular.

HABANA FOR CHILDREN

Cubans love kids, and families traveling together will have special experiences not available to other travelers. Staying in casas particulares is especially recommended as it provides the opportunity for cross-cultural family exchanges. Vagaries of the Cuban reality will demand patience and creativity by parents (particularly when it comes to food) but there is no lack of fun things to do here including the big aquarium in Playa (see Acuario Nacional, p148), plus the freshwater **Aquarium** (Map p94; ☎ 863-9493; Calle Brasil No 9 btwn Mercaderes & Oficios, Habana Vieja; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun); the fantastic **playground** right on the Malecón (at Tacón), replete with rides; **horseback riding** in Parque Lenin; and water slides and bumper cars at **Complejo Recreo** in Marina Hemingway. Head to the **beach** at Playas del Este to sail, kayak and swim. For inflatable castles try **La Maestranza** (Map p94; Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Habana Vieja; admission CUC\$1; under 4s only).

Culturally, there are slews of things specifically for kids including **La Colmenita** children's theater (p137); and **Cinécito** (p137), with all-kids' movies all the time and kids concerts, films and activities every Saturday (3pm) and Sunday (11am) at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Colección de Arte Cubano (p102).

All the **ice-cream parlors** are a delight for children and playing a round of **miniature golf** in Parque Almendares (p134) or seaside at **Holá Ola** (Map pp106-7; Malecón btwn Principe & Valor; minigolf CUC\$2; ☎ 11am-sunset) is

fun for everyone. Even the transport here is kid friendly: hop in an old Chevy, grab a coco-taxi or hire a bici-taxi and discover Habana.

QUIRKY HABANA

Since 1990 local painter Salvador González Escalona has converted **Callejón de Hamel**, between Aramburu and Hospital, off San Lázaro, into an open-air art center with zany murals, sculpture and found-object art. Visit Salvador's **studio** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 878-1661; Callejón de Hamel No 1054; ☎ 10am-6pm) to view (and perhaps purchase) his work. The studio also organizes free cultural activities along the Callejón de Hamel such as the **Sunday rumba** at 11am (beware, this is *jinetero* city), **children's theater** (☎ 10am 3rd Sat of the month), and **street theater** (☎ 7pm, 4th Thu of the month).

The nightly **cañonazo ceremony** at the Fortaleza de la Cabaña, where young actors decked out in 18th-century military regalia shoot off cannons in keeping with a 400-year-old Habana tradition (see p162) is a popular excursion frequented by vast crowds.

Taller Experimental de Gráfica (Map p94; ☎ 862-0979; tgrafica@cubarte.cult.cu; Callejón del Chorro No 6; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) is an active workshop off Plaza de la Catedral selling engravings and prints that you can watch being made on the premises (CUC\$15 to CUC\$800).

Chocolate addicts beware: Habana Vieja's **Museo del Chocolate** (Map p94; cnr Calle Amargura & Mercaderes; ☎ 9am-8pm) is a lethal

GET INVOLVED

There are a number of bodies offering volunteer work in Cuba though it is always best to organize things in your home country first. Just turning up in Habana and volunteering can be difficult, if not impossible. Take a look at the following websites (for more on volunteering, see p466):

Canada World Youth (☎ 514 931-3526; www.cwy-jcm.org) Head office in Montreal, Canada.

Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project (www.farmertofarmer.ca) Vancouver-based sustainable agriculture organization.

Cuban Solidarity Campaign (☎ 020 7263 6452; www.cuba-solidarity.org) Head office in London, UK.

National Network on Cuba (www.cubasolidarity.com) US-based solidarity group.

Witness for Peace (WFP; ☎ 202-588-1471; www.witnessforpeace.org) Looking for Spanish-speakers with a two-year commitment.

Pastors for Peace (PFP; ☎ 212-926-5757; www.ifconews.org) Collects donations across the US to take to Cuba.

dose of chocolate, truffles, and yet more chocolate (and it's all made on the premises too). Situated rather amusingly on the corner of Calle Amargura (Bitterness St), this venerable sweet-toothed establishment is actually more a café than a museum, with a small cluster of marble tables set among an interesting assortment of chocolate paraphernalia. Not surprisingly everything on the rather delicious menu contains one all-pervading ingredient: have it hot, cold, white, dark, rich, or smooth, the stuff is divine, whichever way you choose.

TOURS

Most general agencies offer the same tours, with some exceptions noted below. The regular tour diet includes a four-hour city tour (CUC\$15), a specialized Hemingway tour (from CUC\$20), a *cañonazo* ceremony (shooting of the cannons at the Fortaleza de la Cabaña; without/with dinner CUC\$15/25), a Varadero day trip (from CUC\$35), and, of course, excursions to Tropicana Nightclub (starting at CUC\$65). Other options include tours to Boca de Guamá crocodile farm (CUC\$48), Playas del Este (CUC\$20, includes lunch), Viñales (CUC\$44), Cayo Largo del Sur (CUC\$137) and a Trinidad-Cienfuegos overnight (CUC\$129). Children usually pay a fraction of the price of adults and solo travelers get socked with a CUC\$15 supplement. Note that if the minimum number of people don't sign up, the trip will be cancelled. Any of the following agencies (most of which also have offices

in Playa/Miramar) can arrange these tours and more:

Cubatur (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 31 70/1; cnr Calles 23 & M, Vedado; ☎ 8am-8pm) Below the Hotel Habana Libre.

Havanatur (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 46 51; www.havanatur.cu; Galerías de Paseo, cnr Calle 1 & Paseo, Vedado)

Infotur Airport (Map p155; ☎ 66 61 01; Terminal 3 Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí; ☎ 24hr); Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 63 68 84; cnr Obispo & San Ignacio; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-7pm); Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 33 33 33; Obispo btwn Bernaza & Villegas)

Paradiso (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-9538; fax 33 39 21; Calle 19 No 560, Vedado) Tours with art emphasis in several languages and departing from many cities. Check out Martí's Habana or special concert tours.

San Cristóbal Agencia de Viajes (Map p94; ☎ 861-9171/2; Oficios No 110 btwn Lamparilla & Amargura, Habana Vieja; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-2pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Offers an Habana archaeological tour (CUC\$8) and a Buena Vista Social Club tour (CUC\$15) with 'band members' of the famous group.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The major cultural events in Habana include: FolkCuba in mid-January of odd-numbered years; Festival Internacional del Libro in the last week of January; PerCuba (Festival Internacional de Percusión) every mid-April; Cubadisco and the Festival Internacional de Guitarra every May; and the Ernest Hemingway Dialog each May in odd-numbered years; the Festival Internacional de Boleros de Oro in June; Festival de Rap Cubana Hip Hop in August; the Festival de Teatro de la Habana odd-

numbered years in September; the Festival de Música Contemporánea (Festival of Contemporary Music) every October; the Internacional de Ballet Festival in October in even-numbered years; the annual Marabana Marathon in November; the Festival de Raíces Africanas Wemilere (Wemilere African Roots Festival) in Guanabacoa in late November; the Bienial de la Habana in November in odd-numbered years; the Festival Internacional de Jazz in December of even-numbered years; and the Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano every December.

For advance information about all special events in Cuba, visit AfroCuba web at www.afrocubaweb.com/festivals.htm.

SLEEPING

Private rooms are readily available throughout the city. You'll pay anywhere from CUC\$20 to CUC\$35 per room, with those in Vedado usually better quality and more expensive than those in Centro Habana; however, Vedado is also more suburban, and some people find it too far removed from the action. Don't allow a room tout to lead you around; their commission will add CUC\$5 per night to the cost.

Some of Habana hotels are historic monuments in their own right. Worth a look, even if you're not booking a room,

are the Hotel Sevilla, the Nacional, the Habana Libre, the Saratoga, the Raquel, the Hostal Condes de Villanueva and Hotel Florida.

Habana Vieja**BUDGET**

Residencia Académica Convento de Santa Clara (☎ 866-9327; Cuba No 610 btwn Luz & Sol; r per person CUC\$25) The Old Town's only real budget option (bar the plentiful private rooms) is an old nunnery that has been partially converted to take in travelers. Wedged inconspicuously into Habana Vieja's tightly packed grid, this convent-turned-hostel offers peace and tranquility in the center of the city at a very reasonable price. What's more, it's a tourist site in its own right. Book ahead.

MIDRANGE

Hostal Valencia (Habaguanex; ☎ 867-1037; Oficios No 53; s/d incl breakfast low season CUC\$62/100, high season CUC\$72/120) The Valencia is a veritable Spanish posada (inn) with hanging vines, huge doorways (and rooms) and its own renowned paella restaurant. You half-expect Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to come wandering down the stairway. Slap bang in the middle of the historical core and with a price that makes it one of the cheapest offerings in the current Habaguanex stable, this

CASAS PARTICULARES – HABANA VIEJA

Casa de Pepe & Rafaela (☎ 862-9877; San Ignacio No 454 btwn Sol & Santa Clara; r CUC\$30) One of Habana's best: antiques and Moorish tiles throughout, three rooms each with balconies and gorgeous new baths, excellent location. The son also rents in charming colonial house at San Ignacio No 656 (CUC\$25).

Eliberto Barrios Suárez (☎ 863-3782; eliberto62@webcorreosdecuba.cu; San Juan Días No 112 apt 3A btwn Aguacate & Compostela; apt CUC\$30) Nice two-bedroom duplex apartment with kitchen.

Jesús & María (☎ 861-1378; jesusmaria2003@yahoo.com; Aguacate No 518 btwn Sol & Muralla; r CUC\$25) Rents three rooms, try for one upstairs; inviting inner patio.

Juan & Margarita (☎ 867-9592; Obispo No 522 apt 8 btwn Bernaza & Villegas; apt CUC\$60) Two-bedroom apartment, super central, flexible and friendly hosts. Juan speaks excellent English and has a lot of local knowledge.

Luis Fornaris & Mirtha García (☎ 860-0650; mforaris@empresch.get.tur.cu; Compostela No 119; r CUC\$25) Basic room sleeps three, warmly reader recommended.

Migdalia Carraballe (☎ /fax 861-7352; Santa Clara No 164 btwn Cuba & San Ignacio; r CUC\$25-35) Rents three rooms, two with balconies overlooking Santa Clara convent.

Noemi Moreno (☎ 862-3809; Cuba No 611 apt 2 btwn Luz & Santa Clara; r CUC\$25) Simple, clean room in great location behind convent; also rent in apartment one.

Pablo Rodríguez (☎ 861-2111; pablo@sercomar.telemar.cu; Compostela No 532 btwn Brasil & Muralla; r CUC\$30) Old colonial with original frescos. Rents two rooms with bath, fan and fridge.

Ramón & Maritza (☎ 862-3303; Calle Luz No 115 btwn San Ignacio & Inquisidor; r CUC\$25) Two big interconnecting rooms in colonial house; friendly.

hostel is an excellent old-world choice with good service and plenty of atmosphere.

Hotel El Comendador (Habaguanex; ☎ 867-1037; cnr Obrapia & Baratillo; 🏠) Situated next door to the Valencia, the El Comendador has the same prices.

TOP END

Hotel los Frailes (☎ 862-9383; Calle Brasil btwn Oficinas & Mercaderes; s/d incl breakfast CUC\$72/120; 🏠) This engaging 22-room hotel just off Plaza Vieja sports a tranquil inner courtyard where staff bustle to and fro dressed up as monks. Stained-glass windows and rough-hewn furniture add an extra monastic feel. Upstairs, away from the frivolities, comfortable rooms are distinguished by good art, tasteful furniture and bright modern fittings. The four rooms with balconies are best. An added perk is the resident woodwind quartet in the lobby; the musicians are so good that they regularly lure in bevies of passing tour groups.

Hostal San Miguel (Habaguanex; ☎ 862-7656; Calle Cuba No 52; s/d CUC\$90/150; 🏠) Positioned close to Habana harbor with tremendous views out across the water to La Cabaña fort, the elegant San Miguel was once owned by Cuban newspaper director Antonio San Miguel Segalá, whose periodical *La Lucha* played an important role in the First War of Independence. Characterized by its high ceilings, Carrara marble floors and a plethora of old faded pre-revolution-era photos, the San Miguel's 10 rooms retain a rather fetching old-world feel that blends in nicely with the building's neoclassical belle-époque decor; it's a pleasant Old Town retreat.

Hotel Florida (Habaguanex; ☎ 862-4127; Obispo No 252; s/d incl breakfast CUC\$90/150; 🏠) An architectural extravaganza, the Florida is a three-story jewel built in the purest colonial style, with arches and pillars clustered around a central courtyard loaded with atmosphere. Constructed in 1836, Habaguanex has restored the building with loving attention to detail; the nicely furnished rooms retaining their original high ceilings and luxurious furnishings. Complemented with an elegant café and an amiable bar-nightspot (open from 8pm) anyone with even a passing interest in Cuba's architectural heritage will want to check this one out.

Hotel Ambos Mundos (Habaguanex; ☎ 860-9529; Obispo No 153; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$90/150; 🏠) Hemingway's Habana hideout and the place where he is said to have penned his seminal guerrilla classic *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Castro's bedtime reading during the war in the mountains), the pastel pink Ambos Mundos is a Habana institution and a obligatory pit stop for anyone on a world tour of 'Hemingway-once-fell-over-here' bars. Small sometimes windowless rooms suggest overpricing but the lobby bar is classic enough (follow the romantic piano melody) and drinks on the rooftop restaurant one of the city's finest treats.

Hotel Raquel (Habaguanex; ☎ 860-8280; cnr Calle Amargura & San Ignacio; s/d CUC\$115/200; 🏠) You'll get a neck ache checking out the astounding stained-glass ceilings and authoritative Italian marble pillars here. One of Habaguanex' gorgeously-restored colonial diamonds, the Raquel offers travelers the best of both worlds with a gym, sauna, plush rooms and classy restaurant along with one of the most eye-catching and illustrious front lobbies in any hotel anywhere. Arrive and be seduced.

Hotel Santa Isabel (Habaguanex; ☎ 860-8201; Baratillo No 9; s/d incl breakfast CUC\$190/240; 🏠) Originally the Palacio de los Condes de Santovenia, this weighty colonial colossus on the eastern side of Plaza de Armas is loaded with architectural details, soft lighting, amenable staff and perks such as views, terraces and tubs in every room. The spacious suites are especially nice, with large balconies overlooking the plaza. Jimmy Carter is one of many famous guests who stayed here.

Centro Habana

BUDGET

Casa del Científico (☎ 862-1607/8, Paseo de Martí No 212; s/d with shared bath CUC\$25/31, with private bath CUC\$45/55; 🏠) This is a very welcome budget option slap bang in the middle of the central district which means it fills up fast. The Casa del Científico is an elegant old building with grand stairways, marble columns, courtyards, and terraces overlooking the Prado, making this a nice and atmospheric introduction to Habana. A nice thick coating of dust adds extra authenticity. Nevertheless, services abound

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Condes de Villanueva (Habaguanex; Map p94; ☎ 862-9293; Mercaderes No 202, Habana Vieja; s/d low season CUC\$67/98, high season CUC\$93/150; 🏠) If you are going to splash out on one night of luxury in Habana, you'd do well to check out this highly-lauded colonial gem. Restored under the watchful eye of city historian Eusebio Leal a few years back, the Hostal Condes de Villanueva has converted a grandiose city mansion into an intimate and thoughtfully-decorated hotel with nine bedrooms spread spaciouly around an attractive inner courtyard (complete with resident peacock). Opening onto the cobbled streets below, the upstairs suites contain stained-glass windows, chandeliers, arty sculptures, huge baths and – best of all – a fully-workable whirlpool bathtub. After a few weeks in the Cuban outback, it could be just what the doctor ordered.

Hotel Sevilla (Gran Caribe; Map p100; ☎ 860-8560; Trocadero No 55 btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte; s/d incl breakfast CUC\$150/210; 🏠) Al Capone once hired out the whole 6th floor, Graham Greene used it as a setting for his novel *Our Man in Havana*, and the Mafia requisitioned it as operations centre for their prerevolutionary North American drugs racket. Refurbished by the French Sofitel group in 2002 the Hotel Sevilla now sparkles like the colonial jewel of old with large spacious rooms, comfortable beds and a rather surreally-located ground floor swimming pool (bathers are overlooked by a crumbling city tenement complete with lines of drying washing). The hotel's high point (in more ways than one) has to be the superb 9th-floor restaurant where you can enjoy breakfast overlooking the muggy and mildewed streets of Habana Vieja. A solitary violinist serenades early morning breakfasters with a wonderfully melancholic rendition of *As Time Goes By*.

Meson de la Flota (Habaguanex; Map p94; ☎ 863-3838; Mercaderes No 257 btwn Amargura & Brasil, Habana Vieja; s/d CUC\$45/65; 🏠) Habana Vieja's smallest and most reasonably priced period hotel is an old Spanish tavern decked out with maritime motifs and located within spitting distance of gracious Plaza Vieja. Five individually crafted rooms contain all of the modern comforts and amenities while downstairs a busy restaurant serves up delicious tapas (check out the garbanzos with chorizo) and scrumptiously-prepared *platos principales* (main courses). For music lovers the real draw, however, is the nightly Flamenco tablaos, the quality of which could rival anything in Andalusia. Sit back and soak up the *duende* (spirit).

here (Internet, restaurants, bars, dancing) and it serves as a sort of social center for the neighborhood and traveler traffic (though the guard at the door tempers any hard-core mingling). The rooms are rather ordinary but adequate.

Hotel Lido (Islazul; ☎ 867-1102; Consulado No 210 btwn Ánimas & Trocadero; s/d low season CUC\$21/31, high season CUC\$28/38) A travelers' institution, the lackluster Lido probably boasts a higher concentration of Lonely Planet readers than any other hotel in Cuba. The secret lies in a strangely unexotic mix of location, price, and friendly, no-nonsense service offered up by the staff at reception. If you don't mind cold showers, lumpy beds, and a breakfast that will leave you searching hungrily for an early lunch, this could be a worthwhile Habana base.

Hotel Lincoln (Islazul; ☎ 33 82 09; Av de Italia btwn Virtudes & Ánimas; s/d low season CUC\$30/40, high season CUC\$39/46; 🏠) A venerable nine-story giant

on busy Calle Ánimas, the Hotel Lincoln was the second-tallest building in Habana when it was built in 1926. These days it offers 135 air-con rooms with bath and TV in an atmosphere that is more 1950s than 2000s. Notoriety hit this hotel in 1958 when Castro's M-26-7 (July 26 Movement) kidnapped five-time motor-racing world champion Carlos Fangio from the downstairs lobby on the eve of the Cuban Grand Prix in a propaganda coup. Apparently they planned to kidnap Stirling Moss as well until they found out that the British driver was still on his honeymoon (real gents those Cubans!). Fangio was released a few days later unharmed, speaking highly of his polite captors. As a political protest, the exercise had clearly worked. In the dusty lobby you can see a picture of Fangio meeting a beaming Fidel Castro 20 years later, old grudges apparently forgotten.

Hotel Caribbean (Islazul; ☎ 860-8233; Paseo de Martí No 164 btwn Colón & Refugio; s/d low season CUC\$33/48, high season CUC\$36/54; 🏠) The last and undoubtedly the worst of Islazul's trio of centrally located downtown hotels, the Caribbean gives a new meaning to the term 'rough-around-the-edges.' Don't be fooled by the shiny lobby and adjacent bar; the upper floors hide infinitely more moth-eaten secrets.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Park View (Habaguanex; Calle Colón No 101; s/d CUC\$50/80) Park View's reputation as the poor man's 'Sevilla' isn't entirely justified. Its location alone (within baseball-pitching distance of the Museo de la Revolución) is enough to recommend this mint-green city charmer as a viable option. Chuck in clean rooms, modern furnishings and a small but perfectly-poised 7th-floor restaurant

and you've got yourself a veritable bargain. Other bonuses include cable TV, a small downstairs bar and tiny balconies (in street-facing rooms).

Hotel Deauville (Hotetur; ☎ 33 88 13; cnr Av de Italia No 1 & Malecón; s/d/tr CUC\$61/88/99; 🏠 📺 🚿) The Deauville is housed in a kitschy sea-front high-rise that sharp-eyed Habanawatchers will recognize from picturesque Malecón-at-sunset postcards. But while the location might be postcard perfect, the facilities inside this former Mafia gambling den don't quite match up to the stellar views. Currently reborn in peach and red, Deauville's handy facilities, decent car rental and reasonable restaurant are ever popular with the midpriced tour-circuit crowd; plus it's great for an early morning Malecón stroll.

TOP END

Hotel Inglaterra (Gran Caribe; ☎ 860-8595; www.grancaribe.cu; Paseo de Martí No 416; s/d/tr CUC\$84/120/168; 🏠 📺 🚿) It's José Martí's one-time Habana hotel of choice and it's still playing on the fact – which says something about the current state of affairs. The Inglaterra is a better place to hang-out than actually to stay in, with its exquisite Moorish lobby and crusty colonial interior easily outshining the lackluster and often viewless rooms. The rooftop bar's a popular watering hole and the downstairs foyer is a hive of bustling activity where there's always music blaring. Beware of the streets outside which are full of over-zealous hustlers waiting to pounce.

Hotel Plaza (Gran Caribe; ☎ 860-8592; www.grancaribe.cu; Agramonte No 267; s/d CUC\$84/120; 🏠 📺 🚿) Not a bad hotel, but it suffers because of the rather illustrious company on its doorstep (NH Parque Central & Telégrafo). Still, the lobby's nice even if the rooms ain't so spiffy, with a pleasant café and three decent Internet terminals. Popular on the package-tour circuit, the piano bar makes another good diversion and the adjoining Las Portales restaurant serves pizza for less than CUC\$5 (unusual in a four-star hotel).

Hotel Telégrafo (Habaguanex; ☎ 861-1010, 861-4741; Paseo de Martí No 408; s/d from CUC\$90/150; 🏠 📺 🚿) Offered as a new addition to the Habaguanex chain when it first opened its doors in 2001, this hotel juxtaposes old

style architectural features (the original building hails from 1888) with futuristic design flourishes that include silver sofas, a huge winding central staircase, and an awesome tile mosaic emblazoned on the wall of the downstairs café. The rooms are equally spiffy.

Hotel Saratoga (Habaguanex; Paseo de Martí No 603; s/d CUC\$150/190; 🏠 📺 🚿) In a city with a dearth of budget hotel options another five-star outfit was probably the last thing we needed. Still, the restored Saratoga is big and beautiful, with huge baths, modern funky furnishings, mosaic tiles and panoramic views over the Capitolio. Built originally as a hotel in the 1930s the Saratoga Mark I was requisitioned by the Castro government in 1959 and converted into homes for Habana's urban poor. Mark II reopened in November 2005, back to its luxurious best. There's a swimming pool on the roof and the rooms are positively opulent. It's worth a peep even if you're not staying there.

Hotel NH Parque Central (NH Hotels; Map100; ☎ 860-6627; www.nh-hotels.com; Neptuno btwn Agramonte & Paseo de Martí; s/d CUC\$185/215; 🏠 📺 🚿) Facility-wise the NH Parque Central is Habana's luxury giant and the luscious ground-floor lobby is the ultimate place to relax after a day spent trudging the uneven cobbles of Old Habana (great coffee). Blessed with a rooftop pool, international-standard rooms and a sharp and breezy business center open to all-comers, the only real let-down in this oasis of urban peace is the cool, almost aloof attitude of the overly-efficient staff who seem to have had every last element of their Cuban-ness sucked out of them.

Vedado

BUDGET

Hotel Bruzón (Islazul; ☎ 877-5684; Bruzón No 217 btwn Pozos Dulces & Av de la Independencia; s/d CUC\$22/28; 🏠) The price comes with a price: tired and worn facilities and an ugly and highly inconvenient location. The one and only reason to stay at this hotel is for its proximity to the (Astro) bus station. Bleary-eyed arrivals on the 6:30am guagua (bus) from Santiago might appreciate its lumpy beds.

Hotel Universitario (☎ 33 34 03; cnr Calle 17 & Calle L; s/d CUC\$25/34) This friendly place opposite

CASAS PARTICULARES – CENTRO HABANA

Alejandro Osés (☎ 863-7359; Malecón No 163 1st fl; r CUC\$25) Three rooms, sea views very popular, English spoken.

Amada Pérez Güelmes & Antonio Clavero (☎ 862-3924; Lealtad No 262 Altos btwn Neptuno & Concordia; r CUC\$25) Four rooms available in pleasant colonial house.

Carlos Luis Valerrama Moré (☎ 867-9842; Neptuno No 404 2nd fl btwn San Nicolás & Manrique; r CUC\$25) Big space with living/dining room and balcony.

Casa Marta (☎ 863-3078; bienvenidoalcorazon@yahoo.com; Manrique No 362; r CUC\$30) Three rooms around inner patio; chance to meet other travelers.

Dulce Hostal – Dulce María González (☎ 863-2506; Amistad No 220 btwn Neptuno & San Miguel; r CUC\$20) Beautiful colonial house, tile floors, soaring ceilings, quiet, friendly hostess.

Elicio Fernández (☎ 861-7447; Aguila No 314 apt 405 btwn Neptune & Concordia; r CUC\$25) Breezy rooms with lots of natural light. Fan and shared bath. Doorman and elevator. Rooftop views.

Esther Cardoso (☎ 862-0401; esthercv2551@clubarte.cult.cu; Aguila No 367 btwn Neptuno 7 San Miguel; r CUC\$25) Artist's palace; this place is like an oasis in the desert with tasteful decor, funky posters, spick-and-span baths and spectacular roof terrace. Book early.

José Ricardo (☎ 861-6413; Neptuno No 560 1st fl btwn Lealtad & Escobar; CUC\$25) Nice hosts with good local knowledge. Meals available.

Juan Carlos (☎ 863-6301, 861-8003; Crespo No 107 btwn Colón & Trocadero; r CUC\$15-20) Big, spotless house. Cheapest room has shared bath and fan. Natural light throughout. Value.

Julio & Elsa Roque (☎ 861-8027; julioroq@yahoo.com; Consulado No 162, apt 2, btwn Colón & Trocadero; r CUC\$15-25) Rents two rooms with different amenities. Cheapest has shared bath, fan only and cold water. Both Julio – who is a pediatrician – and Elsa are super-helpful and a mine of information. English spoken.

La Casona Colonial – Jorge Díaz (☎ 870-0489; cubarooms2000@yahoo.com; Gervasio No 209 btwn Concordia & Virtudes; r CUC\$25) Several rooms around nice courtyard, one has three beds, shared bath; good for longer stays.

Martha Obregón (☎ 870-2095; marthaobregon@yahoo.com; Gervasio No 308 Altos btwn Neptuno & San Miguel; r CUC\$20-25) Nice home, little balconies have small street views. Popular, often full.

Niurka O Rey (☎ 863-0278; Aguila No 206 btwn Animas & Virtudes; r CUC\$20-25) Sparkling blue house with slightly less sparkling but adequate interior. One room with bath and parking close by.

Paraiso 'Vista al Mar' – Tamara Valdés (☎ 861-8112; Malecón No 51 14th fl, btwn Carcel & Genios; r CUC\$30) If it's a view you're after and you don't mind traveling up 14 floors in an antiquated lift, check out this spacious option right on the Malecón.

Rufino Añel Martín & Pilar Rodríguez Santos (☎ 862-4149; Neptuno No 556 btwn Lealtad & Escobar; r CUC\$25) Lively, edgy area. Can cook and do laundry; helpful hosts.

Sandra Elso Aguilera (☎ 861-2944, 70 75 16; Consulado No 304 apt 3E btwn Neptuno & Virtudes; r CUC\$25) Friendly.

Triny Vital (☎ 867-9132; Calle Aguila No 118 Bajos btwn Colón & Trocadero; apt CUC\$50) Two-bedroom independent apartment with kitchen sleeps four to five.

Victoria Rivero Nuñez (☎ 863-7750; Consulado No 304 apt 2D btwn Neptuno & Virtudes; r CUC\$30) Spacious. Eighteen others renting in this building.

the Servi-Cupet gas station has a good location. It's basic, but you won't find another hotel in central Vedado for this price.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Colina (Gran Caribe; ☎ 33 40 71; cnr Calles L & 27; s/d low season CUC\$40/50, high season CUC\$44/54; 🏠) Well-worn rooms, bored staff and sparse facilities; the Colina often gets a bad press. But with its central location opposite the university and its slightly cheaper prices compared with other midrange options, budget travelers will find a good base here. An added bonus: it isn't normally full.

Hotel St John's (Gran Caribe; ☎ 33 37 40; Calle O No 216 btwn Calles 23 & 25; s/d incl breakfast low season CUC\$50/67, high season CUC\$56/80; 🏠 🚿) The rooftop pool is small and the staff unresponsive, but the beds are good, the baths clean and western-facing rooms have killer Malecón views. Vibrant Vedado awaits outside your window. Use the safe deposit box when you hit the town and check out the 14th-floor Pico Blanco nightclub (p134).

Hotel Vedado (Gran Caribe; ☎ 832-2806; Calle O No 244 btwn Calles 23 & 25; s/d low season CUC\$50/67, high season CUC\$56/80; 🏠 🚿 🚿) St John's versus

CASAS PARTICULARES – VEDADO

Angela Muñoz Rubio (☎ 879-6851; San Miguel No 1116 btwn Mazón & Basarrate; r CUC\$25) Rents rooms near Museo Napoleónico, two with private bath.

Armando Gutiérrez (☎ /fax 832-1876; Calle 21 No 62 apt 7 btwn M & N; r CUC\$25-30) Nice room with balcony and fridge. Friendly; English spoken; elevator.

Basilía Pérez Castro (☎ 832-3953; bpcdt@hotmail.com; Calle 25 No 361 apt 7 Bajos btwn K & L; r CUC\$25) Two rooms with independent entrances, fridge, phone, TV. Mellow, good value.

Beatriz & Julio (☎ 832-5778; Calle 25 No 367 btwn K & L; r CUC\$25-30; 🏠) Close to university and central hotels. Separate entrance.

Casa de Jannett (☎ 831-7367; Calle F No 610 btwn 25 & 27; r CUC\$25) Colonial house, close to university.

Casa Teresita (☎ 832-0777; Calle 21 No 4 apt 54 btwn O & N; r CUC\$25) Clean room, doting hostesses. Good for bikes.

Conchita García (☎ 832-6187; conchitagarcia21@hotmail.com; Calle 21 No 4 apt 74 btwn N & O; r CUC\$30-35) Well-kept apartment with two rooms, TV, nice terrace. Numerous others in this building.

Doris Jorge (☎ 32 50 29; Calle 21 No 15, Apt 9, btwn N & O; r CUC\$25) Penthouse with views. Rooms are huge and hostess amiable. Ascend in elevator to 6th floor.

Eddy Gutiérrez Bouza (☎ 832-5207; Calle 21 No 408 btwn F & G; r CUC\$30; 🏠 🚿) Huge colonial house with fantastic host. Eddy is an excellent source of information about Habana.

Guillermina & Roberto Abreu (☎ 833-6401; Paseo No 126 apt 13A btwn 5 & Calzada; r CUC\$25) Two spacious rooms with views. Elevator here.

Iraida Carpio (☎ 832-4084; Calle 19 No 376 fl 10A btwn G & H; r CUC\$25) Take antiquated elevator. A splendid view.

Julio Padilla Martín (☎ 832-5709; juliop_martin@hotmail.com; Calle K No 210 apt 7B btwn Línea & 15; r CUC\$30-35) Good for groups. English spoken.

Manuel Martínez (☎ 832-6713; Calle 21 No 4 apt 22 btwn N & O; r CUC\$30-35) There are 10 to 12 casas in this magnificent art-deco building constructed in 1945 opposite the Hotel Nacional. This one overlooks the hotel gardens; it's a classic view.

Maribel y Luis Garcé (☎ 832-1619; Calle 19 No 356 upstairs btwn G & H; r CUC\$25) Nice young couple rent smallish room, little balcony.

Marta Vitorte (☎ 885-7792; martavitorte@hotmail.com; Calle G No 301 apt 14 btwn 13 & 15; r CUC\$35-40) Two rooms in deluxe apartment with phenomenal views, great beds, wraparound terrace. English spoken.

Melba Piñeda Bermudez (☎ 832-5929; lienafp@yahoo.com; Calle 11 No 802 btwn Calles 2 & 4; r CUC\$25-30) Sweet room with nice furnishings and private terrace in beautiful colonial home. Quiet street. Helpful owners.

Natalia Rodes (☎ 832-8909; Calle 19 No 376 fl 11B btwn G & H; r CUC\$25) Shared bath, nice bed, expansive views.

Nelsy Alemán Machado (☎ 832-8467; Calle 25 No 361 apt 1 btwn K & L; r CUC\$25) Independent, laid-back place. Fridge.

Pilar Palma (☎ 831-8918; Calle O No 202 apt 9 btwn 23 & 25; r CUC\$25) Prime La Rampa location; friendly.

MARRIED TO THE MOB

'We invented Havana and we can goddamn well move it someplace else if [Batista] can't control it' boasted Mafia boss Meyer Lansky in the Sydney Pollack-directed movie *Havana*.

Brazen and hyperbolic, Lansky's comments carry a certain amount of historical weight. Cuba's on-off marriage with the American Mafia first took root in the 1920s when Prohibition in the US sent pleasure-seeking Americans flocking south to line up their rum cocktails in the bars and hotels of sensuous Habana. Al Capone was an early adherent, financing an illegal molasses-supplying racket for illicit Cuban rum factories; though the real deal – high-stakes gambling – didn't take off until after World War II.

Lansky and notorious Mafia Don, Salvatore 'Lucky' Luciano were the main second-phase instigators. In December 1946, the two corpulent mobsters coordinated the largest ever get together of North American mafia hoods in Habana's Hotel Nacional under the cover of a Frank Sinatra concert. Hatching a plan to open up the Cuban capital to narcotics, pornography and large-scale gambling houses, the duo enlisted the clandestine support of opportunist ex-President Fulgencio Batista.

The plan reached fruition in March 1952 when a Batista coup toppled the regime of Carlos Prío Socarrás and enacted laws that gave organized crime a free rein in Cuba's corrupt capital. Over the next eight years Habana became a gambling and vice mecca to rival Las Vegas, a veritable den of iniquity where – in the words of Graham Greene – 'anything was possible.'

Grossly underestimating the popular force of Fidel Castro, the Mob was largely taken by surprise when the scruffily-attired *barbudas* rolled into Habana in January 1959 with their puritanical socialist ideals taped to their rifles. Greeting them gruffly at the door of the Hotel Capri, famous Hollywood actor and Mafia henchman George Raft is said to have furiously slammed the door in their faces. Fatefully, such bold acts of arrogance weren't to last. With the casinos closed down and the high spending tourists packed off across the water to Florida, Lansky and the rest of his cash-embezzling cronies were summarily kicked out of Cuba in June 1959, after which they beat a hasty retreat back to the US with their tail between their legs. The era of loose morals and decadent high-rolling gambling was over as quickly as it had begun.

Vedado is a toss-up. Stakeout the lobbies of both (they're virtually next door to each other) and see which staff seem *less* stropy. The hotel itself is reasonable enough, with swimming pool, small gym and nightly cabaret show, but at this price you're better off treating yourself to a night in the Old Town.

Hotel Victoria (Gran Caribe; ☎ 33 35 10; fax 33 31 09; Calle 19 No 101; s/d incl breakfast low season CUC\$55/70, high season CUC\$65/90; 🏠 🚿 🚿) This intimate five-story hotel off the main strip has only 31 rooms and is a good Vedado option if you want more personable service than the Nacional or Habana Libre offer. Rooms are tight, but well-equipped with fridge, safe and minibar. Built in the roaring '20s, it has buckets of style.

TOP END

Hotel Riviera (Gran Caribe; ☎ 33 40 51; www.grancaribe.cu; cnr Paseo & Malecón; s/d incl breakfast low season CUC\$74/105, high season CUC\$91/130; 🏠 🚿) Built by US Mafia boss Meyer Lansky in

1957, this hotel oozes character – all the spacious lobby lacks is a lounge lizard in a sharkskin suit. Some of the 354 rooms have terrific sea views and balconies; two have been laid out for disabled guests. The big pool catches sea breezes and the Copa Room here hosts top bands nightly. There are lots of facilities (bank, shops, tourism desks etc), making this a decent choice, especially if you want to be by the water and not pay through the nose. The location means lots of walking, guaguas (local buses) or taxis.

Hotel Presidente (Gran Caribe; ☎ 55 18 01; www.grancaribe.cu; cnr Calzada & Calle G; s/d CUC\$90/140; 🏠 🚿 🚿) Fully restored in 2000, this 160-room hotel wouldn't be out of place on a street just off Times Square in New York. Built the same year as the Victoria (1928), the Presidente is similar but larger, with gruffer staff. Unless you're a walker or are comfortable working Habana's transport system, the location can be awkward.

Hotel Meliá Cohiba (Sol Meliá; ☎ 33 36 36; fax 33 45 55; Paseo btwn Calles 1 & 3; r low season CUC\$180, high season CUC\$225; P ☎ ☎ ☎) Professional with a capital P, Meliá hits the spot with knowledgeable, consistent staff and modern, well-polished facilities in this oceanside concrete giant. After a few weeks in go-slow mode you'll be impressed by the responsiveness of the service here, although the building itself is architecturally ugly and the ambience inside more international than Cuban. For workaholics there are rooms especially kitted out for business travelers and 59 units have Jacuzzis. There's also a shopping arcade and the Habana Café here.

Hotel Nacional (Gran Caribe; ☎ 55 00 04; cnr Calles 0 & 23; s/d/tr CUC\$120/170/238; P ☎ ☎ ☎) The cream of the crop in Cuban hotels and flagship of the government-run Gran Caribe chain; the neoclassical Hotel Nacional is as much a city monument as it is an international accommodation option. Even if you haven't got the money to stay here, chances are you'll end up sipping at least one icy mojito in its exquisite oceanside bar. Steeped in history and furnished with rooms that enthusiastically advertise the details of illustrious occupants past (emblazoned on plaques in the corridors), this towering Habana landmark sports two swimming pools, a sweeping manicured lawn, a couple of lavish restaurants, and its own top-class nighttime cabaret show (the *Parisièn*). While the rooms might lack the fancy gadgets of deluxe Varadero, the ostentatious communal areas and the erstwhile ghosts of Winston Churchill, Frank Sinatra, Lucky Luciano and Errol Flynn that hover like invisible statues around the luxurious lobby, all add up to a fascinating and unforgettable experience.

Hotel Habana Libre (Gran Caribe; ☎ 55 47 04; www.solmeliacuba.com; Calle L btwn Calles 23 & 25; d/ste incl breakfast CUC\$200/300; P ☎ ☎ ☎) Habana's biggest and brassiest hotel opened in March 1958 on the eve of Batista's last waltz. Once part of the Hilton chain, it was commandeered by Castro's rebels in January 1959 who put their boots over all the plush furnishings and turned it into a temporary headquarters (Castro effectively ran the country from a suite on the 24th floor). Now efficiently managed by Spain's Tryp Hotels all 574 rooms in this modernist giant are kitted out to international standard with

small balconies and up-to-date fittings that still somehow feel old. The tour desks in the lobby are helpful for out-of-town excursions and the weekend music shows often showcase notable artists such as Buena Vista star Eliades Ochoa. Nonguests can use the pool (admission with food-and-drink purchase of at least CUC\$15; open 8am to 6:30pm).

EATING

Habana Vieja PALADARES

Most of Habana's best paladares are in Miramar or Vedado leaving Habana Vieja, with its plethora of enticingly restored state-run restaurants, with no more than a few metaphoric crumbs. Not that this has stopped an undercover army off-duty waiters/*jineteros* creeping around with the word *langosta* (lobster) planted on their lips. The following two paladares are worth a second glance.

La Julia (☎ 862-7438; O'Reilly No 506A btwn Bernaza & Villegas; meals under CUC\$10; ☎ noon-midnight) The pick of the Habana Vieja litter by consensus, this is *comida criolla* (traditional Cuban food) in a friendly, familial setting.

Paladar La Mulata del Sabor (☎ 867-5984; Sol No 153; btwn Cuba & San Ignacio; meals CUC\$10; ☎ noon-midnight) Just off Plaza Vieja, this place is OK if you've been overdosing on the historic Habaguanex restaurant scene and want a little more intimacy.

RESTAURANTS

Cafetería Torre La Vega (Obrapia No 114a btwn Mercaderes & Oficinas; ☎ 9am-9pm) This friendly, reliable place is hard to beat with its outdoor tables and large bowls of spaghetti for just over CUC\$1. Try some of the crispy, handmade chips with your cold beer. Next door is a phenomenal batido (fruit shake) and juice joint.

La Lluvia de Oro (☎ 862-9870; Obispo No 316; meals under CUC\$3; ☎ 24hr) An seedily atmospheric restaurant and bar with overhead ceiling fans stirring up the cigar smoke and loud trumpet blasts emanating from a live Cuban septet that rarely seem to leave the stage. This is a good place for a pizza and beer or mojito and sandwich. It's also a popular traveler hang-out, which also means there's plenty of business-touting *jineteras* (women who attach themselves to

foreigners for material or monetary gain) on hand.

Restaurante Mirador de la Bahía (Obispo No 61; ☎ noon-midnight). On the 5th floor above the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, this place has great views – when it's open (you'll know if it's not because the security guard will shoo you away). Dine on cheeseburgers and pizza for less than CUC\$6 while gazing over the bay at El Cristo. Has live music and dancing during lunch and dinner hours.

Al Medina (☎ 867-1041; Oficinas No 12 btwn Obrapia & Obispo; ☎ noon-midnight) This is Habana's top Middle Eastern place, where you can dine on lamb (CUC\$9) or chicken (CUC\$5) with a spicy twist. It's especially recommended for its voluminous veggie platter that comes with hummus, tabbouleh, dolma, pilaf and felafel. Budget eaters will dig the cheaper specials at the cafeteria just inside on the left (kebab, rice, salad and drink). There's live music in the courtyard.

Restaurante La Paella (☎ 867-1037; Hostal Valencia, cnr Oficinas & Obrapia; ☎ noon-11pm) Known for its paella or fish (CUC\$10) this place has a nice inner decor and is attached to the Hostal Valencia. Food is middling to good when they don't run out of vegetables.

Hanoi (☎ 867-1029; cnr Brasil & Bernaza; ☎ noon-11pm) The name might be demonstrating solidarity with formerly 'communist' Vietnam, but the food certainly isn't. Straight-up Creole cuisine with a couple of fried rice dishes thrown in for good measure characterize this Old Town favorite which mixes Cuban clientele with a liberal smattering of budget travelers with their noses in the Lonely Planet. Live music to dine by.

La Mina (☎ 862-0216; cnr Obispo & Oficinas; ☎ 24hr) An institution with side-by-side patio restaurants with a classic Plaza de Armas location. Stick to the chicken or pork (CUC\$7 to CUC\$8) if you're peaked, but this place is better for mojitos, coffee and people watching.

Restaurante La Dominica (☎ 860-2918; O'Reilly No 108; ☎ noon-midnight) Widely considered to be Habana's finest Italian restaurant, this elegantly restored dining establishment on O'Reilly offers everything from spaghetti and pizza (CUC\$5 to CUC\$7) to shrimp and lobster (CUC\$10 to CUC\$18). Service is efficient if a little sterile, and the food tastes authentically Mediterranean, though the chefs are sometimes a little overzealous

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

If you're looking for a memorable dining experience in Habana, the following restaurants are recommended:

La Cocina de Lilliam (Map pp146-7; ☎ 209-6514; Calle 48 No 1311 btwn 13 & 15, Miramar; ☎ noon-midnight) Slick service, secluded ambience and freshly-cooked food to die for, La Cocina de Lilliam has all the ingredients of a prize-winning restaurant par excellence. In the circumstances it's no small wonder that Jimmy Carter made a pit stop here during his landmark 2002 visit (for the record he had *ropa vieja*, or shredded beef). Set in an illustrious villa in Miramar and surrounded by a garden of trickling fountains and lush tropical plants, diners can tuck into such Cuban rarities as chicken mousse and tuna bruschetta in an atmosphere more European than Caribbean. Not a cheese and ham sandwich in sight!

El Aljibe (Map pp146-7; ☎ 204-1583/4; Av 7 btwn Calles 24 & 26, Miramar; ☎ noon-midnight). On paper a humble Palmares restaurant, but in reality a rip-roaring culinary extravaganza, El Aljibe has been delighting both Cuban and foreign diplomatic taste buds for years. The furor surrounds the gastronomic mysteries of just one dish, the obligatory *pollo asado* (roast pork) which is served up with as-much-as-you-can-eat helpings of white rice, black beans, fried plantain, French fries and salad. The accompanying bitter orange sauce is said to be a state secret.

Paladar La Guarida (Map p100; ☎ 863-7315; Calle Concordia No 418 btwn Gervasio & Escobar; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight) Located on the top floor of a spectacularly dilapidated Habana tenement, La Guarida's lofty reputation rests on its movie-location setting (*Fresa y Chocolate* was filmed in this building), and a clutch of swashbuckling newspaper reviews (including the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*). The food, as might be expected, is up there with Habana's best, shoeorning its captivating blend of Cuban 'Nueva Cocina' into dishes such as sea bass in a coconut reduction, and chicken with honey and lemon sauce. Reservations required.

with the olive oil. Professional house bands will serenade you with music that occasionally departs from the obligatory Buena Vista staples.

Restaurante El Castillo de Farnés (☎ 867-1030; Av de Bélgica No 361; seafood CUC\$7-20; ☎ noon-midnight) This is a good pre- or post-theater place but don't make a special trip. The bar alongside with sidewalk tables is a good spot to cool your heels awhile.

La Torre de Marfil (☎ 867-1038; Mercaderes No 111 btwn Obispo & Obrapia; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Fri-Sun) Often touted as one of Habana's best Chinese restaurants, the atmosphere and decor in this minimalist Old Town classic are certainly authentic. The chop suey and chow mein plates – when they arrive – are huge and the vegetables unusually fresh and crisp. After the noise and music of other Habana restaurants this place feels quieter and more discreet.

Restaurante El Patio (☎ 867-1034/5; San Ignacio No 54; meals CUC\$15-20; ☎ noon-midnight) Possibly one of the most romantic settings on planet earth when the hustlers stay away, the mint stalks in your mojito are pressed to perfection and the band break spontaneously into your favorite tune. This place – in the Plaza de la Catedral – must be experienced at night al fresco when the atmosphere is almost other-worldly.

Café del Oriente (☎ 860-6686; Oficinas 112; appetizers CUC\$8-12, mains CUC\$20-27; ☎ noon-11pm) Habana suddenly becomes 'posh' when you walk through the door at this choice establishment on breezy Plaza de San Francisco de Asís. Smoked salmon, caviar (yes, caviar!), goose liver pate, lobster thermidor, steak au poivre, cheese plate, and a glass of port. Plus service in a tux, no less. There's just one small problem: the price. But what the hell?

Centro Habana

PALADARES

Paladar Bellamar (Virtudes No 169 near Amistad; dishes from CUC\$6; ☎ noon-10pm) A good standby. The amiable family here offers classic chicken, pork and fish dishes. The walls are decorated with graffiti in the style of the famous Bodeguita del Medio, Hemingway's Habana Vieja drinking haunt.

Paladar Amistad de Lanzarote (☎ 863-6172; Amistad No 211 btwn Neptuno & San Miguel; meals CUC\$6-8; ☎ noon-midnight) The portions are large and English is spoken.

Paladar Doña Blanquita (no phone; Paseo de Martí No 158 btwn Colón & Refugio; meals CUC\$7-9; ☎ noon-10pm) The balcony overlooking Prado here is a romantic, if bustling, spot for classic Cuban cuisine (lots of pork, rice and beans). The service is friendly and the food reliable. Enter through the narrow, unmarked doorway and go upstairs.

Paladar Las Delicias de Consulado (☎ 863-7722; Consulado No 309 btwn Neptuno & Virtudes; meals from CUC\$8; ☎ noon-midnight) This place in the scrappy Consulado corridor has a small upstairs terrace for dining. Dishes are the usual pork-and-bean fare. It also rents rooms.

RESTAURANTS

Restaurante Oasis (Centro Cultural Cubano Árabe, Paseo de Martí No 256; ☎ 2pm-3am) The Arab-inspired menu here is reasonable and there is also a floor show on Saturday at 9pm. A shop at the entrance sells bread. The disco is a *jineteras*-fest.

Los Dos Dragones (☎ 862-0909; Dragones No 311; ☎ noon-10:30pm) Away from the Cuchillo madness, this is Chinatown's most reliable restaurant, serving up tremendous portions of shrimp in red sauce and chicken with bamboo shoots and mushrooms. It does a booming business in oyster cocktails.

Tres Chinitos (☎ 863-3388; Dragones No 355 btwn San Nicolás & Manrique; ☎ noon-midnight) A Chinese restaurant that specializes in (good) Italian fare; this, after all, is Cuba. Tres Chinitos is famous for its pizzas (CUC\$4), salads and long snaking line-ups. Hit Chinatown and find out what it's all about.

Flor de Loto (Salud No 313 btwn Gervasio & Escobar; dishes CUC\$4-8; ☎ noon-midnight) Chinatown's newest addition is this place specializing in grilled lobster and interesting dishes such as fish with almond sauce. The portions are tremendous – try a mountain of fried rice – and the kitchen opens into the dining room, giving you a sneak peak.

Restaurante Tien-Tan (☎ 861-5478; Cuchillo No 17 btwn Rayo & San Nicolás; ☎ 11am-11pm) Of the cookie-cutter Chinese places on the Cuchillo, this is the best hands down. There're 130 dishes to choose from and you can eat several for under CUC\$10 (payable in pesos or Convertibles). It does an especially good wonton soup. Expect a 20% service charge to be added to your bill.

Prado y Neptuno (cnr Paseo de Martí & Neptuno; dishes CUC\$6-9; ☎ noon-5pm & 6:30pm-11:30pm) Dark

lighting and tinted windows lure you into this trusty pizza and pasta joint; one of central Habana's better Italian restaurants.

Some of the street stalls selling *cajitas* (take-out meals) in Chinatown's Cuchillo are better than the actual restaurants.

Also recommended:

Feria Los Fornos (Neptuno btwn Paseo de Martí & Consulado; ☎ 24hr) Try the grilled meats (CUC\$2 to CUC\$6) in this open courtyard if you're not rushed for time.

Restaurante Puerto de Sagua (☎ 867-1026; Av de Bélgica No 603; ☎ noon-midnight) Nautical-themed with super-friendly staff serving fish dishes starting at CUC\$5 and shrimp at CUC\$8.

Vedado

PALADARES

Better than Centro and Vieja, but not in the same bracket as Miramar, Vedado has it coming and going with the paladar selection. These are some of the tried and true favorites; you're encouraged to find your own.

Paladar El Helecho (☎ 831-3552; Calle 6 No 203 btwn Línea & Calle 11; dishes around CUC\$5; ☎ noon-10:30pm) Tucked along a leafy side street in western Vedado, this romantic little place is a longtime favorite. The nice atmosphere is complemented by decent prices (around the CUC\$5 mark) and good portions. The food is remarkably good. Try the chicken soup which a Cuban friend called 'the best I've had outside my own kitchen': high praise.

El Gringo Viejo (☎ 831-1946; Calle 21 No 454 btwn Calles E & F; ☎ noon-11pm) Locals and visitors alike swear by this place for the speedy service, a fine wine list and big portions of more adventurous plates such as smoked salmon with olives and gouda or crabmeat in red sauce (both around CUC\$8).

Paladar Nerei (cnr Calles 19 & L; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 6pm-midnight Sat & Sun) Where else can you get roast pig on a spit served al fresco right in the middle of the city? Nowhere but here, according to the owners. Nerei is a good central dining option in old eclectic villa with indoor and outdoor seating. Family-run.

Paladar Aries (☎ 831-9668; Ave Universidad No 456, Bajos, btwn J & K; ☎ noon-midnight) Traditional Cuban fare mixed with what are generously referred to as 'international dishes,' this nicely decked out family-run place with occasional wandering *trovadores* (traditional

singer/songwriters) is conveniently located behind the university.

Paladar El Hurón Azul (☎ 879-1691; Humboldt No 153; dishes CUC\$7-12; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sun) You'll eat well here; it's a solid central Vedado paladar with windowless but tasteful dining rooms. Meals start with a nice fruit plate, but save room for the scrumptious mains (try the snapper in red and green sauce or the 'La Guajira' house special). You may have to wait for a table here; there's a 10% service charge.

Decameron (☎ 832-2444; Línea No 753 btwn Paseo & Calle 2; meals CUC\$10-12; ☎ noon-midnight) Nothing mediocre will ever pass your lips at this intimate Italian restaurant, so order from the varied menu with abandon. Veggie pizza, lasagna Bolognese, a sinful calabaza soup, steak au poivre: it's all good. There's a decent wine selection and vegetarians will find heavenly options.

Le Chansonnier (☎ 832-1576; Calle J No 257 btwn Calles 13 & 15; mains CUC\$10-12; ☎ 12:30pm-12:30am) You'll sup in your own elegant dining room in this Vedado mansion-turned-paladar specializing in French flavors. Rabbit in red-wine sauce, chicken smothered in mushrooms, and gigantic salads for herbivores are some of the offers in this gay-friendly establishment. Save room for dessert.

Also recommended:

Paladar Escorpión (Calle 17 No 105 btwn Calles L & M; meals CUC\$6-7; ☎ noon-2am) Next to El Conejito Bar.

Paladar Los Amigos (out back, Calle M No 253; ☎ noon-midnight) Handy location beside the Focsa building.

Paladar Monopoly (☎ 832-2471; Calle K No 154 btwn Línea & Calle 11; ☎ noon-1am) Museum-quality dining digs; unsignposted, ask a neighbor if in doubt.

RESTAURANTS

Cafe TV (☎ 33 44 99; cnr Calles N & 19; ☎ 10am-9pm) This bar-restaurant in the bowels of the Focsa Building has real breakfast: eggs, toast, juice etc, with nothing over CUC\$1. The lunch and dinner menu is varied and cheap and at night there's live music. Televisión Cubana is around the corner, hence the name and theme.

Pan.com (☎ 53 50 40; cnr Calles 17 & 10; ☎ 10am-2am) Cuba's answer to Subway, this place does big, fresh sandwiches (turkey with cheese on a baguette for example), bacon and egg breakfast and veggie burgers heavy on the fixings. The milkshakes (real milk,

creamy ice cream) are incredible. Nothing is over CUC\$5. There's an even better branch in Miramar.

El Lugar (☎ 204-5162; cnr Calles 49C & 28A; ☎ noon-midnight) Even more reason to come to Parque Almendares, this restaurant just across the road from the river below the bridge is fantastic value. For under CUC\$5 you get a juicy pork filet, a whole heap of *congrí* (rice flecked with black beans), salad, *tostones* (fried plantain patties), ice cream and coffee. Add a Convertible or two for *ropa vieja* or fish. There's a talented trio playing nights. The pizza place attached is good too.

Trattoria Maraka's (☎ 33 37 40, ext143; Calle 0 No 260 btwn Calles 23 & 25; ☎ 10am-11pm) Real olive oil, parmesan and mozzarella cheese, plus a wood oven, mean this pizza is among the city's best. Also on offer are Greek salads, tortellini with red sauce, spinach-stuffed cannelloni – the menu is long and quality, with few items over CUC\$8.

El Conejito (☎ 832-4671; Calle M No 206; ☎ noon-midnight) The odd, Tudor-type brick building on the corner is the 'little rabbit' and that's

the house specialty. There are many other items on the menu, all done equally reliably. There's a lively bar scene here too.

Mesón de la Chorrera (☎ 33 45 04; cnr Malecón & Calle 20; ☎ 10am-2am) In the Castillo de Santa Dorotea de Luna de Chorrera (1643).

Restaurante 1830 (☎ 55 30 90; Malecón No 1252; ☎ noon-10pm) One of Habana's most elegant restaurants is this old stalwart (though one reader called it 'terrible'). After the kitchen closes at 10pm there's live music and salsa dancing in the garden behind the restaurant (don't come on a windy night).

La Torre (☎ 55 30 89; Edificio Focsa, Calle 17 & M) One of Habana's tallest and most talked about restaurants is perched high above downtown Vedado atop the skyline-hogging Focsa building. A colossus of both modernist architecture and French/Cuban haute cuisine, this lofty fine-dining extravaganza combines sweeping city views with a progressive French-inspired menu that serves everything from artichokes to foie gras to tart almandine. The prices at CUC\$30 a pop (and the rest!) are as distinctly un-Cuban as the ingredients, but

with this level of service, it's probably worth it.

Also recommended:

Restaurante Bulerías (☎ 832-3823; Calle L No 414 btwn Calles 23 & 25; ☎ 11am-10pm) Don't venture into the basement here, but eat at the sidewalk tables.

Restaurante Wakamba (☎ 878-4526; Calle 0 btwn Calles 23 & 25; ☎ 24hr) Forty years and still going, this bar/counter place serving light meals hosts many late-night characters.

Palmares Centro (cnr Calles 23 & P) Cheap, cheerful and central on La Rampa.

Spanish Clubs

Several Spanish clubs that are open to the public have excellent, inexpensive restaurants. Most are in pesos (but can also accept Convertibles), which makes them an attractive option if you're 'going Dutch' with Cuban friends or colleagues.

Asociación Canaria de Cuba (Map p100; ☎ 862-5284; Av de las Misiones No 258 btwn Neptuno & Ánimas; ☎ noon-8:30pm) Go to the 2nd-floor dining room of this club across from the Edificio Bacardí and you'll be treated to a varied menu featuring shrimp or lobster, fish and several chicken dishes. The atmosphere is fluorescent lights and plastic flowers in the dining room, but the foyer is grand.

Centro Andaluz (Map p100; ☎ 863-6745; Paseo de Martí No 104 btwn Genios & Refugio; ☎ 6-11pm Tue-Sun) For a CUC\$10 plus price-tag, you might splash out and try the house paella for two, or pinch some pennies and go for the fish or pork filet for under CUC\$5. Regardless, try the house cocktail '*locura flamenca*.' You can see flamenco dancing here starting at 9pm Tuesday to Sunday.

Cafés

Café Santo Domingo (Map p94; Obispo No 159 btwn San Ignacio & Mercaderes; ☎ 9am-9pm) Tucked away upstairs above the excellent pastry/bread shop this laid-back café is cheap and tasty. Check out the ice-cream shakes, huge *sandwich especial* or smuggle up some of the cakes from downstairs to enjoy over a steaming cup of *café con leche* (coffee with warm milk).

Bar-Restaurant La Luz (Map p94; ☎ 24hr) Next door to Café Santo Domingo with a resident *jinetero* normally calling you in, this place offers one-peso shots of strong coffee.

Pastelería Francesa (Map p100; Parque Central No 411) Great location in among the five-star

hotels, this place sells delicious pastries, sturdy sandwiches and OK coffee. The swarming *jineteras* spoil the French flavor a little and the service is slow, but for the sheer convenience it can't be beaten.

El Mercurio (Map p94; ☎ 860-6188; Lonja del Comercio; ☎ 24hr) On Plaza de San Francisco de Asís, this is an elegant café-restaurant ('for businessmen and travelers') with fresh salads and sandwiches.

Café La Logia (Map p100; ☎ 861-5657; Capitolio; ☎ 9am-7pm) With tropical atmosphere to spare, this breezy terrace café provides excellent views of all the classic cars and general action going on below the Capitolio. Hole up here and nosh on a good veggie or meat sandwich or sip a cappuccino or mojito.

Pain de Paris (Vedado Map pp106-7; Calle 25 No 164 btwn Infanta & 0; ☎ 8am-midnight; Vedado Map pp106-7; Línea btwn Paseo & Calle A; ☎ 24hr) This chain serves reliable cappuccino, croissants (with ham and cheese if you like), napoleons and other pastries. A box of treats from here is nice to share if you're invited to a Cuban home for dinner.

Café de O'Reilly (Map p94; O'Reilly No 203 btwn Cuba & San Ignacio; ☎ 11am-3am) Upstairs at O'Reilly is a Habana classic for both nighttime rum shots and late-morning hair of the dog.

Café Wilfredo Lam (Map p94; San Ignacio No 22; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) At the center of the same name, this is an arty nook for a drink. Next to the cathedral.

G-Café (Map pp106-7; Calle 23 btwn Av de los Presidentes & Calle H) The ultimate student hang-out with arty wall drawings and a modernist mural behind the bar. An airy front patio has lots of greenery and there are more than 400 books and magazines to read, lend and sell. Along with deftly concocted mojitos this place hosts *trova*, jazz and poetry auditions.

Ice-Cream Parlors

Habana has some fabulous ice cream, available both in Convertibles and pesos – just the ticket on a hot day. *Paleticas* are popsicles (usually chocolate covered), while *bocaditos* are big, delicious ice-cream sandwiches (often handmade). For more ice-cream vocab, see the Food & Drink chapter (p84). Ice-cream cones are sold on the street for three pesos. Otherwise you can try these parlors:

MEAT'S NOT FOR ME

Cubans like their meat and who can blame them. Not only is the cuisine traditionally carnivorous, but after the leanest years of the *periodo especial* (special period; Cuba's new economic reality post 1991), people are anxious to consume as much protein as possible – just in case. It's surprising then, that a new chain of vegetarian restaurants, plus TV cooking shows advocating healthy (and often meatless) eating habits have been such a big hit. They certainly are with foreigners and even if you're not a vegetarian, the restaurants listed below provide great and welcomed variety to the same old pork/chicken/rice/bean scenario.

Biki Vegetarian Restaurant (Map pp106-7; cnr Infanta & San Lázaro, Centro Habana-Vedado border; ☎ noon-10pm, closed Mon) This place near the university has dozens of selections daily, laid out cafeteria style; grab a tray and pick from several fresh juices and salads (four to six pesos), veggie paella, fried rice or stuffed peppers (10 to 15 pesos), root vegetables (six pesos) and desserts such as rice pudding. Be aware that the staff at this restaurant and the branch on Calzada have developed the nasty habit of charging foreigners indiscriminate Convertible prices. This is a peso restaurant; don't let them bully you into paying Convertibles.

Restaurant Vegetariano Carmelo (Map pp106-7; Calzada btwn Calles D & E; ☎ noon-midnight, closed Mon) This place has the same menu as Biki, but a much nicer locale opposite the Teatro Amadeo Roldán, with patio dining and a full bar. Once again be careful with the over-charging. One tip is to refuse the table service they try to push upon you and just proceed cafeteria style.

Restaurante El Bambú (Map p155; Jardín Botánico; ☎ noon-5pm, closed Mon) This is the first and finest in Habana vegetarian dining and has led the way in education efforts as to the benefits of a meatless diet. The all-you-can-eat lunch buffet is served al fresco deep in the botanical gardens, with the natural setting paralleling the wholesome tastiness of the food. For CUC\$15 you can gorge on soups and salads, root vegetables, tamales and eggplant caviar. Herbs grown on the premises figure prominently in the dishes. Juices, desserts and coffee are on offer too. Coupled with a visit to the garden, it makes an excellent side trip.

Bim Bom (Map pp106-7; ☎ 879-2892; cnr Calles 23 & Infanta, Vedado) Phenomenally creamy stuff in flavors like coffee, condensed milk (sounds gross, tastes great) and rum raisins; in Convertibles.

Coppelia (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-6184; cnr Calles 23 & L, Vedado) The original. See the boxed text, opposite.

Heladería Obispo (Map p94; Obispo No 58) New peso parlor in the heart of Habana Vieja; often has fruit flavors (pineapple, strawberry etc).

Take-out

There are some great peso places sprinkled about. Some of the most outstanding **peso pizza** (Map pp106-7) is at San Rafael just off Infanta (look for the line). They make the pizza on the roof, so you have to shout up your order (there's a menu posted) and then it comes down via a rope/basket rig. This may be the only peso place offering 'pizza Hawaiiiana' (ham and pineapple). In Vedado try around Calles H and 17 where there are clusters of **peso stalls** (Map pp106-7) and Calle 21 between Calles 4 and 6 (Map pp106-7); this area is close to the hospital, so there's great variety and long hours.

Cajitas can save your night: these complete take-out meals in cardboard boxes usually cost about CUC\$1. Some boxes have cut-out spoons on the lid, but most don't, so you'll have to supply your own fork (or use part of the box itself as a shovel). You can usually buy *cajitas* at *agropecuarios* (vegetable markets); otherwise, private cafeteria and *merenders* (snack seller) windows sell them. Chinatown is known for its *cajitas*.

Self-Catering

HABANA VIEJA

Café Santo Domingo (Map p94; Obispo No 159 btwn San Ignacio & Mercaderes; ☎ 9am-9pm) Some of the best bread and pastries can be procured at this place, downstairs underneath the café.

The local farmers market is called **Agropecuario Sol** (see below).

CENTRO HABANA

Harris Brothers (Map p94; O'Reilly No 526; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) The best-stocked store in the entire area. It's just off Parque Central, with a large liquor selection (including wine),

HABANA'S BEST AGROPECUARIOS

Agropecuarios are free enterprise markets (legalized in 1994) where farmers sell their surplus produce to private consumers (after selling a set quota to the state); they are not to be confused with *organopónicos* which are urban vegetable gardens run by local community groups that sell organic produce from small kiosks on-site (see the boxed text, p158).

Agros are not only good for buying raw, fresh foods; they are also handy for getting pesos (every large market has a Cadeca), *cajitas*, fresh meat, bread, cut flowers and other natural products such as herbs, honey, spices, beeswax candles etc. Every market also has a '*protección de consumidor*' section with a scale where they'll weigh what you've purchased. Go here if you think you've been ripped off (a merchant caught three times cheating is booted from the market). Most markets are closed Monday. Here are some of Habana's biggest:

Agropecuario Sol (Map p94; Calle Sol btwn Habana & Compostela, Habana Vieja) Compact, well-stocked market; decent variety.

Calle 17 & K (Map pp106-7; cnr Calles 17 & K, Vedado) Another 'capped' market with cheap prices, but limited selection.

Calle 19 & A (Map pp106-7; Calle 19 btwn Calles A & B, Vedado) Habana's 'gourmet' market with cauliflower, fresh herbs and rarer produce during shoulder seasons; prices reflect the selection.

Calle 21 & J (Map pp106-7; cnr Calles 21 & J, Vedado) Good selection, including potted plants; watch for overcharging.

Mercado Agropecuario Egido (Map p100; Av de Bélgica btwn Corrales & Apodaca, Centro Habana) Gigantic market: the action is over by 2pm.

Organopónico Plaza (Map pp106-7; cnr Av de Colón & Bellavista, Plaza) One of Habana's biggest organic farms with a retail market.

Plaza de Marianao (Map pp146-7; cnr Av 51 & Calle 124, Marianao) Friendly local market with produce downstairs and flowers and plants upstairs. Head east up Av 51 for amazingly varied peso shopping.

Tulipán (Map pp106-7; Av Tulipán, Plaza) This is a huge, 'capped' market, with prices set by the government; so it's cheap.

MAKING CENTS OF COPPELIA

Until you've gone slack jawed watching a young woman with a model's body wolf down nine scoops of ice cream followed by a cake à la mode with childish delight, you haven't eaten at Coppelia. Truly a cultural phenomenon without equal, waiting a near eternity to enter the weirdly futuristic but retro halls of this Habana ice-cream institution is an essential part of getting to know Cuba (and the Cubans). Loitering around the perimeter, strategically-positioned security guards try to usher foreigners toward the Coppelia's sterile Convertible café but, with a little persistence and a few persuasive words in Spanish, there's no reason why you can't join one of the long and seemingly disorganized queues on the periphery. Ah...the queues. Hard though it may be to believe, there's a system to the peso part which many foreigners don't observe or get. Here's how it works.

There are several entrances to Coppelia, each with their own menu, line and dining area. Die-hards cruise the different entrances to see what's on each menu. What the menu says and what's actually on offer once you're inside is another story, but more often than not you'll encounter *fresa y chocolate* (strawberry and chocolate), coconut, banana and orange-pineapple, so it's not just vanilla (though Coppelia's vanilla is luscious). Shout out *Quién es último?* (Who is last?), as you approach the line and remember to log the face of whoever is in front of you. Sections are seated all at once, so some 20 people are let in en masse and are shown to their section. A server comes around, tells you what's available, takes your order and brings back the goods. They come around afterward to collect your money. Rainy days are classically slow here, so you might minimize wait times by showing up then. The language of ice-cream love is complex here. Suffice to say, a movie at Cine Yara across the street, followed by a *jimagua* (two scoops of ice cream) at Coppelia is the classic Habana date.

cheeses, bread, olives and other picnic goodies.

Supermercado Isla de Cuba (Map p100; cnr Máximo Gómez & Factoría; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) On the southern side of Parque de la Fraternidad, with yogurt, cereals, pasta etc. You have to check your bag outside, to the right of the entrance.

Almacenes Ultra (Map p100; Av Simón Bolívar No 109; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) A decent supermarket in Centro Habana, at the corner of Rayo, near Av de Italia.

La Época (Map p100; cnr Av de Italia & Neptuno; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) A hard-currency department store with a supermarket in the basement. Check your bags outside before entering this epic Habana emporium.

For fresh produce hit the free enterprise **Mercado Agropecuario Egido** (Map p100; Av de Bélgica btwn Corrales & Apodaca).

VEDADO

Supermercado Meridiano (Map pp106-7; Galerías de Paseo, cnr Calle 1 & Paseo; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sun) Across the street from the Hotel Meliá Cohiba, this supermarket has a good wine and liquor selection, lots of yogurt, cheese and chips. The bread is overpriced.

DRINKING

Habana Vieja
La Bodeguita del Medio (☎ 33 88 57; Empedrado No 207; ☎ 11am-midnight) La Bodeguita was made famous thanks to the rum-swilling exploits of Ernest Hemingway (who by association instantly sends the prices soaring), and a visit to Habana's most celebrated bar has become de rigueur for literary sycophants and Walt Whitman wannabes. Notables including Salvador Allende, Fidel Castro, Nicolás Guillén, Harry Belafonte and Nat King Cole have all left their autographs on La Bodeguita's wall. These days the clientele is less luminous, with package tourists bussed in from Varadero delighting in the bottled (some say canned) bohemian atmosphere and the CUC\$4 mojitos (which though good have lost their Hemingway-esque shine). The menu specialty is *comida criolla* or 'the full monty' Cuban style.

Café Paris (Obispo No 202; ☎ 24hr) Jump into the mix by grabbing one of the rough hewn tables at this Habana Vieja standby, known for its live music and gregarious atmosphere. On good nights, the rum flows, talented musicians jam and spontaneous dancing and singing erupt from the crowd. Filling slices of pizza (CUC\$0.50) are sold

at a take-out window on the side of the building.

Bar La Marina (cnr Oficios & Brasil; ☎ 10am-11pm) The courtyard is an inviting glen in which to take a break after visiting the Monasterio de San Francisco de Asís. A Cuban combo plays in the afternoons. The popcorn is very good (when the machine is working).

Bar Dos Hermanos (☎ 861-3436; San Pedro No 304; ☎ 24hr) On the corner of Sol near Muelle Luz. A wonderful old wooden dive, this was a favorite Habana hang-out of Spanish poet Federico García Lorca during his three months in Cuba in 1930. Pub snacks such as oyster cocktails, hamburgers and chicken go well with the drinks. The salty atmosphere adds to the flavor, but this is a rather seedy area late at night.

Fundación Havana Club (cnr Sol & Malecón; ☎ 9am-midnight) For something more upscale, try the bar inside this place, where it's all rum all the time, plus live music.

Café Taberna (☎ 861-1637; cnr Calle Brasil & Mercaderes) Founded in 1772 and still glowing after a recent 21st-century makeover, this drinking and eating establishment is a great place to prop up the (impressive) bar and sink a few cocktails before dinner. The music – which gets swinging around 8pm – doffs its cap, more often than not, to one-time resident mambo king Benny Moré. Skip the food.

Taberna de la Muralla (☎ 866-4453; cnr San Ignacio & Muralla; ☎ 11am-midnight) Habana's best (and only) homebrew pub is situated on a quiet corner of Plaza Vieja. Set up by an Austrian company a couple of years back, this unique no-nonsense drinking establishment sells smooth cold homemade beer at sturdy wooden benches set up outside on the cobbles or indoors in a couple of atmospheric beer halls. Get a group together and they'll serve the amber nectar in a tall plastic tube which you draw out of a tap at the bottom. There's also an outside grill here where you can order good helpings of chorizos, fish and kebabs.

For bars with views, try the Restaurante Mirador de la Bahía on the southern side of the Plaza de Armas, above the Museo Nacional de Historia Nacional, or one of the 24-hour Cristal kiosks along the Malecón (at the end of O'Reilly for instance).

If you need to kill time before a train departure, try **El Baturro** (cnr Av de Bélgica & Merced;

☎ 11am-11pm) If you ever need to kill time before a train departure, try El Baturro, a Spanish bistro with a long wooden bar and an all-male – aggressively so – drinking clientele.

La Zaragozana (☎ 867-1040; Av de Bélgica btwn Obispo & Obrapia; ☎ noon-midnight) Established in 1830 this is Habana's oldest restaurant but a long way from being its best. Skip the food, but drop in for a drink, and music from 9pm.

Centro Habana

El Floridita (☎ 867-1300; Obispo No 557; ☎ 11am-midnight) Hemingway was a bar-hopper and name maker and this place, like La Bodeguita del Medio, cashes in on the literary legend. A bartender named Constante Ribalagua assured El Floridita's place in drinking history when he used shaved ice to make frozen daiquiris here in the 1920s. A decade later Hemingway arrived and the Papa Hemingway Special (rum with grapefruit juice, lemon juice and crushed ice) was created in his honor. His record (legend has it) was 13 doubles in one sitting. Any attempt to equal it at the current prices (CUC\$6 a single shot) will cost you a small fortune – and a huge hangover.

Rather than rubbing sunburned elbows with the tour-bus crowd in El Floridita, drop in next door to the **Monserrate Bar** (☎ 860-9751; Obrapia No 410) Rather than rubbing sunburned elbows with the tour-bus crowd in El Floridita, drop in next door to the Monserrate Bar, where you can enjoy the same drink for a third of the price quoted by the red-coated waiters in Hemingway's habitual hang-out. Skip the cheap (for a reason) food. Across the street, Restaurante El Castillo de Farnés has good value, light food and an infinitely more airy atmosphere.

Restaurante Prado 264 (Paseo de Martí No 264; btwn Animas & Trocadero; ☎ noon-10:30pm) Has a long wooden bar in the back. Don't eat here if they ask you to pay Convertibles for peso food.

Vedado

Opus Bar (cnr Calzada & Calle D; ☎ 3pm-3am) Above Teatro Amadeo Roldán. With individual candle-lit tables, overstuffed chairs and Sly and the Family Stone on the airways, this is Habana's (good) approximation of a

lounge. The wall of windows make it a great sunset spot and performances in the theater downstairs are broadcast via closed-circuit TV; a good alternative if that hot concert is sold out.

Bar-Club Imágenes (☎ 33 36 06; Calzada No 602; drink minimum CUC\$5; ☎ 9pm-5am) This upscale piano bar attracts something of an older crowd with its regular diet of boleros and *trova*, but sometimes there are surprise concerts by big name musicians; check the schedule posted outside. Meals are available (and affordable).

For a more intellectual scene, check out the bar/café in the basement of the **Centro de Prensa Internacional** (cnr Calles 23 & O; ☎ 9am-7pm), where journalists and writers talk shop over coffee, whiskey and wine.

ENTERTAINMENT

One Saturday a month, the Plaza de la Catedral is closed off for a spectacular **Noche Plaza** (night plaza) with 100 of Cuba's finest singers, dancers and other entertainers performing on a stage directly in front of the cathedral. The staff at Restaurante El Patio should know the date of the next extravaganza.

Folk & Traditional Music

Casa de la Cultura de La Habana Vieja (Map p94; ☎ 863-4860; Aguiar No 509 btwn Amargura & Brasil; admission adult/child 5 pesos/free; ☎ 9pm) Habana Vieja's active casa usually has something on like Afro-Cuban dancing or folk singing nightly. The program varies every week (and it could be canceled if it's raining). The staff can arrange Cuban dancing lessons. They sometimes charge foreigners CUC\$5 instead of five pesos, which might be worth it depending on the event.

Casa de la Trova (Map p100; ☎ 879-3373; San Lázaro No 661; admission free; ☎ 7pm-late Tue-Sun) Surprisingly one of Cuba's most lackluster *trova* houses, if it's open at all. You're better off following the live sounds around the nocturnal nooks of Habana Vieja.

El Hurón Azul (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-4551; cnr Calles 17 & H, Vedado) Uneac is the nerve center of official art and intellectual life in Cuba, and this is its social club. Intellectuals associated with Uneac are usually in attendance and you might even hobnob with hip Minister of Culture Abel Prieto (you'll know him by his mullet). Wednes-

day is the Afro-Cuban Peña del Ambia (CUC\$5), Saturday it's authentic Cuban boleros (CUC\$1; open 10pm to 2am) and alternate Thursdays there's jazz and *trova* (CUC\$1; open 5pm). It doesn't get much better than this.

El Gato Tuerto (Map pp106-7; ☎ 66 22 24; Calle O No 14 btwn Calles 17 & 19, Vedado; drink minimum CUC\$5; ☎ dusk-dawn) Once the headquarters of Habana's alternative artistic and sexual scene, this chic bar with live music still packs in the folks from the old days, although now they're a little softer around the middle. It's amazing to behold on a crowded weekend night as scores of 40-somethings belt out boleros word-for-word with the band, shouting requests and cramming the dance floor.

Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (Map pp106-7; Calle 4 No 103 btwn Calzada & Calle 5, Vedado; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 3pm Sat) Founded in 1962, this high energy ensemble specializes in Afro-Cuban dancing (all of the drummers are Santería priests). See them perform, and dance along during the regular Sábado de Rumba at El Gran Palenque. This group also performs at Teatro Mella. A major festival called FolkCuba unfolds here biannually during the second half of January.

The other space to experience rumba includes the wild Callejón de Hamel (see p115) where you'll need to look out for the *jineteros*.

Jazz

Jazz Club La Zorra y El Cuervo (Map pp106-7; ☎ 66 24 02; cnr Calles 23 & O, Vedado; admission CUC\$5-10; ☎ 10pm) The house band is good, and its freestyle jazz is a nice change from salsa. Thursday is blues night and this place hosts great late-night jams during the International Jazz Fest; check out the cool photos by local photographer Leslie Sinclair (and cast member of Lonely Planet's *Six Degrees Havana*).

Jazz Cafe (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 33 02; top fl, Galerías de Paseo, cnr Calles 1 & Paseo; drink minimum CUC\$10; ☎ noon-late) This upscale joint overlooking the Malecón is like a jazz supper club, with tables and a decent menu (come here for cocktails at sunset). At night, the club swings into action with jazz, *timba* (Cuban popular music) and occasionally, straight up salsa. Pity the dance floor is just a strip between the tables.

Rock, Reggae & Rap

Patio de María (Map pp106-7; Calle 37 No 262 btwn Paseo & Calle 2; admission 5 pesos) This legendary club near the Teatro Nacional de Cuba is run by the equally legendary María Gattorno. A great old-school venue with indoor and outdoor space, it's packed to the rafters with head-banging Habaneros. Check the *cartelera* (cultural calendar or schedule) posted at the door or head to Parque de los Rockeros (corner of Calles 23 and G) to find out what's happening. This unpretentious counterculture venue has received considerable media coverage in Cuba and abroad, partly due to Gattorno's AIDS- and drug-prevention educational work. It was undergoing a restoration, but should be open again soon.

La Madriguera (Map pp106-7; ☎ 879-8175; cnr Salvador Allende & Luaces, Quinta los Molinos; admission 5-10 pesos) Connected with the Asociación's Hermanos Saíz, Uneac's youth arm, rock, rap and reggae concerts occur at this venue in Quinta los Molinos (enter via Calzada de Infanta). A local scene, this is a good place to meet young Cuban artists and musicians.

Anfiteatro Parque Almendares (Map pp106-7; cnr Calle 23 & Río Almendares; admission 2 pesos) This riverside amphitheater hosts regular musical events and special concerts by the likes of Frank Delgado and Interactivo. It's an intimate place to catch some terrific music. Regular *peñas* (musical performances) include reggae (8pm Friday) and rap (8pm Saturday). You can also catch a rap matinee (4pm Saturday) at Cafe Cantante (right) and the rock cover band Los Kents (4pm Sunday).

Dance Clubs

In Cuba, a dance club usually means DJs and recorded music, with a dance floor taking priority over seating (your basic disco), while a nightclub features live music and table seating. Female travelers should be prepared for lots of attention in Habana's discos, whether they're traveling solo or not. Cuban dance styles involve lots of touching, grinding and frisson in general and if you're in the mix, it's assumed you're game. Set your boundaries early.

CENTRO HABANA

El Palermo (☎ 861-9745; cnr San Miguel & Amistad; admission CUC\$2; ☎ from 11pm Thu-Sun) Your casa

hostess will likely warn you away from this local disco. It's very much in the 'hood, with a heavy rap scene. Fun, but *fuerte* (intense).

Discoteca Ribera Azul (☎ 833-8813; cnr Av de Italia & Malecón; per couple CUC\$5; ☎ closed Tue) More tame than El Palermo, this place is downstairs from the lobby of the Hotel Deauville.

VEDADO

Cabaret Las Vegas (☎ 870-7939; Infanta No 104 btwn Calles 25 & 27; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 10pm-4am) Mostly a local scene; head here to cut loose with Cubans. There's recorded music followed by a show at midnight. The patio overlooking the street is a nice place for a beer.

El Chevere (Parque Almendares, cnr Calles 49A & 28A; admission CUC\$6-10; ☎ from 10pm) One of Habana's most popular discos, this al fresco place in a lush park setting hosts a good mix of locals and tourists.

Pico Blanco (☎ 833-4187; Calle 0 btwn Calles 23 & 25; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 9pm) This disco on the 14th floor of the Hotel St John's ('the cathedral of *filin'*' say fans of this soupy music) can be hit or miss. Some nights it's karaoke and cheesy boleros, another night it's jamming with some rather famous Cuban musicians. Check the schedule posted in the hotel window. The rooftop bar here has terrific views.

Cafe Cantante (☎ 879-0710; cnr Paseo & Calle 39; admission CUC\$10; ☎ 9pm-5am Tue-Sat) Below the Teatro Nacional de Cuba (side entrance), is this disco with live salsa music and dancing. The music is good and it's a popular place, despite being in a low-ceilinged basement. The crowd is usually a decent mix, though a certain type of tourist and the local women they favor are very much in evidence. No shorts, T-shirts, hats, photos or under 18s allowed.

Vedado has a few mixed peso-Convertible discos that are great fun (especially if your budget has blown out) including **Club La Red** (☎ 832-5415; cnr Calles 19 & L; admission CUC\$3-5) and **Karachi Club** (☎ 832-3485; cnr Calles 17 & K; admission CUC\$3-5; ☎ 10pm-5am). As with all clubs, late night Friday and Saturday are best.

To the west are **Discoteca Amanecer** (☎ 832-9075; Calle 15 No 12 btwn Calles N & O; admission CUC\$3-5; ☎ 10pm-4am) and **Club Tropical** (☎ 832-7361; cnr Línea & Calle F; ☎ 9pm-2am).

Nightclubs

Piano Bar Delirio Habanero (Map pp106-7; ☎ 873-5713; cnr Paseo & Calle 39; admission CUC\$5; ☎ from 6pm Tue-Sun) This plush lounge upstairs in the Teatro Nacional hosts everything from young *trovadores* to aging *salseros* (salsa singers) and when it gets hot, it rocks to the rafters. The deep red couches about a wall of glass overlooking the Plaza de la Revolución and it's stunning at night with the Martí Memorial alluringly backlit.

Habana Café (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 36 36; Hotel Meliá Cohiba, Paseo btwn Calles 1 & 3; minimum at bar/table, plus cover CUC\$5/10; ☎ from 9:30pm) If you prefer to see big salsa acts such as Pupi y Su Son Son or NG La Banda in a controlled, upscale setting, come here. (Otherwise, cut way loose at Salón Rosado Benny Moré, p153.) The layout at Habana Café is cabaret style, with tables and chairs surrounding a stage and dance floor; American 1950s memorabilia, including old cars, motorcycles and gas pumps, constitute the decoration. You can eat here too.

La Casa de la Música Centro Habana (Map p100; ☎ 878-4727; Av de Italia btwn Concordia & Neptuno; admission CUC\$5-10) Imagine seeing U2 live for CUC\$5. One of the understated successes of the Cuban Revolution is that you can see top performers play classy music for next to nothing. The Centro Casa is a little edgier than its Miramar counterpart (some have complained it's too edgy), with big salsa bands and the odd 'name' act thrown in for good measure.

Cabarets

Cabaret Nacional (Map p100; ☎ 863-2361; San Rafael No 208; per couple CUC\$10; ☎ 9pm-2am) Come to this cabaret alongside the Gran Teatro de La Habana, for a mix of show (as captivating as it is camp) and dancing. The show kicks off at 11:30pm, followed by steamy dancing. Thursday to Sunday is best; there's also a matinee (admission CUC\$5; 3pm till 8pm) here. The Nacional maintains a couples-only and minimum-dress policy: definitely no shorts or T-shirts.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?!

Plays, concerts, book launches, ballets, poetry readings, rap *peñas* – there's always something happening in Habana. The problem is finding out when and where. Here are some tips to get plugged in to what's on.

- 'Hurón Azul' – This is a select schedule of the week's biggest cultural events broadcast every Thursday night at 10:25pm on Cubavisión (Channel 6).
- *Cartelera de la Habana* – Broader listings (in Spanish) of things happening all over town, published biweekly by the Ministry of Culture. This is one of your best resources; sold at newspaper kiosks (20 centavos). Look for it alternate Thursdays.
- *Cartelera* – Bilingual English-Spanish for the tourist population (www.cartelera.com; Calle 15 No 602) comes out every Thursday, but it lists what they think you want to see. Still, good for non-Spanish speakers. Look for it in big hotels.
- *Juventud Rebelde* – The daily newspaper has decent cultural listings.
- Posters – Concert flyers usually appear around La Rampa, from Calle L up to 'Rocker's Park' at Calle de los Presidentes (also known as Calle G).
- Radio – Radio stations are constantly promoting upcoming cultural events; tune to Radio Taíno (93.3 FM) or Radio Habana (94.9FM).
- Web – Check out www.cubarte.cult.cu and www.afrocubaweb.com for concerts, dance and fine art listings.
- Word of Mouth – There's nothing better. Because the state publishes *Cartelera* and produces 'Hurón Azul,' you have no chance of learning of anything underground. Also, you'll learn about spontaneous/spur-of-the-moment happenings by talking to people.
- Pounding the pavement – Cubans know it's hard to get the word out, so every cinema posts the week's showings at every other city cinema (called the Icaic Cartelera) and theaters post a schedule at their box office. If all else fails, make the rounds to see what's happening.

Cabaret Turquino (Map pp106-7; cnr Calles 23 & L; admission CUC\$15; ☎ opens 10pm) Some of Cuba's biggest bands play here (including Los Van Van) and superstar parties (to close the film or jazz festival, for instance) sometimes happen here too. It's a spectacular place on the 25th floor of the Hotel Habana Libre, with unsurpassable views.

Cabaret Parísien (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 35 64; cnr Calles 21 & O; admission CUC\$35; ☎ 9pm) If you want to experience Cuban cabaret but aren't quite up for the Tropicana, this room at the western end of the Hotel Nacional lobby is a good choice. You get all the feathers and fun, plus it becomes a disco after midnight

and if there are any VIPs in town, they'll be here.

Theater

Ballet, opera and theater performance are mostly at 8:30pm Monday to Saturday, with a matinee at 5pm Sunday.

HABANA VIEJA

The **Casa de la Comedia** (cnr Calle Jústiz & Baratillo) sometimes presents live theater in Spanish.

CENTRO HABANA

Gran Teatro de La Habana (La Sala García Lorca; ☎ 861-3077; cnr Paseo de Martí & San Rafael; per per-

son CUC\$10; ☎ box office 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, until 3pm Sun) This magnificent theater is closely associated with its most famous resident: the acclaimed Ballet Nacional de Cuba and its founder Alicia Alonso. The National Opera performs here occasionally. You'll often hear this theater referred to as the Sala García Lorca, which is the grandest of several concert halls here (the others are the Sala Alejo Carpentier and Sala Ernesto Lecuono, where art films are sometimes shown). You can count on some type of live musical event every Friday, Saturday and Sunday (check the notices posted outside the theater).

Teatro Fausto (☎ 863-1173; Paseo de Martí No 201) Presents lighter fare. The humorous programs on Friday and Saturday at 8:30pm and on Sunday at 5pm are great fun. See the schedule posted outside.

Teatro América (☎ 862-5695; Av de Italia No 253 btwn Concordia & Neptuno) This theater made its name with big variety shows by talents like Roberto Carcassés, and you still might catch his jazzy act here, but it also hosts blowout rumba, rap and drum concerts too (tickets are sold on the day of the performance). You can also have dance lessons here (p114).

VEDADO

Teatro Nacional de Cuba (☎ 879-6011; cnr Paseo & Calle 39; per person CUC\$10; ☎ box office 9am-5pm & before performances) This modern theater on the Plaza de la Revolución hosts landmark concerts, foreign theater troupes, La Colmenita children's company and the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. The main hall is the Sala Avellaneda and hosts big events, while the smaller Sala Covarrubias along the back side puts on a more daring program like the recent Cuban adaptation of Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*. The 9th floor is a rehearsal and performance space where the newest, most experimental stuff happens like Teatro El Puente. The ticket office is at the far end of a separate single-story building beside the main theater.

Teatro Mella (☎ 833-8696; Línea No 657 btwn Calles A & B) This cozy theater hosts all manner of dance, music and theater performances. The Festival Internacional de Ballet happens here and the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional calls this theater home. Travelers with kids will enjoy the children's show Sunday at 11am.

Sala Teatro Hubert de Blanck (☎ 833-5962; Calzada No 657 btwn Calles A & B) This theater is named for the founder of Habana's first conservatory of music (1885). The Teatro Estudio based here is Cuba's leading theater company. You can usually see plays in Spanish here Saturday at 8:30pm and Sunday at 7pm. Tickets are sold just prior to the performance.

Teatro Nacional de Guíñol (☎ 832-6262; Calle M btwn Calles 17 & 19) Has quality puppet shows and children's theater.

If you understand Spanish, it's well worth attending some of the cutting-edge contemporary theater that's a staple of Grupo Teatro Rita Montaner in the **Sala Teatro El Sótano** (☎ 832-0833; Calle K No 514 btwn Calles 25 & 27; ☎ 5-8:30pm Fri & Sat, 3-5pm Sun), not far from the Habana Libre. Performances are Friday and Saturday at 8:30pm, Sunday at 5pm. Also check **Café Teatro Brecht** (cnr Calles 13 & I), where varied performances take place. Tickets go on sale one hour before the performance.

Classical Music

Teatro Amadeo Roldán (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-4522; cnr Calzada & Calle D; per person CUC\$10) This lovely modern theater is the seat of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, which plays in the 886-seat Sala Amadeo Roldán (concerts on Sundays at 11am in season). Try to catch a program conducted by master Leo Brouwer. Major concerts (eg Síntesis, Egberto Gismonti, Aldo Pérez-Gavilán) also go down here. Soloists and small groups play in the 276-seat Sala Caturla. Built in 1922, this magnificent building was destroyed by an arsonist in 1977 and only reopened in 1999 after a careful restoration.

Classical and chamber music concerts also happen nearly nightly at the **Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís** (Map p94; Plaza de San Francisco de Asís) and the **Iglesia de San Francisco de Paula** (Map p94).

Cinemas

There are about 200 cinemas in Habana. Most have several screenings daily and every theater posts the *Cartelera Icaic*, which lists show times for the entire city. Tickets are usually two pesos; queue early. Hundreds of movies are screened throughout Habana during the Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano. Schedules are published daily in the *Diario del Festival*,

THE SEX TRADE

'The one thing Castro can't ration is sex' Cuban commentators have been prone to quip and one look around the bars and clubs of nocturnal Habana, where impossibly attractive Cuban prostitutes stroll arm in arm with ageing 'sugar-daddies' from Torino or Dusseldorf, is enough to prove them correct.

It's ironic that in a state where rationing is a given and empty supermarket shelves are a wearisome part of everyday life that there never seems to be any shortage of young, pretty señoritas 'available' for carnal relationships. Indeed, while technically illegal, prostitution in Cuba – which was equally rampant during the Batista era – is the one of the few capitalist enterprises that the socialist government has so far failed to stamp out.

Economically speaking the situation is understandable. Contact with foreign men gives Cuban woman access to interchangeable currency and the opportunity of bagging double a doctor's monthly salary in a week. There's even the not-so-remote possibility of spontaneous nuptials and the promise of a new and better life overseas.

For the planeloads of over-sexed foreign males who fly in weekly to find out that they've been suddenly reborn as Brad Pitt, the attractions are equally libidinous. Indeed, Cuba's growing reputation as an exotic mix of sun, sand, socialism and...sex, with no strings attached, has given rise to an whole new (unofficial) sex industry based on the well-tested economic laws of supply and demand.

Not surprisingly the 'rules of engagement' have a number of peculiarly Cuban characteristics. Unlike other financially disadvantaged countries in the developing world, Cuban prostitutes – or *jineteras* as they are popularly known – are not part of any highly organized network of pimps. Furthermore, Cuba is not a society where sex is sold to fuel a drug habit, or procure the next square meal. On the contrary, many of these illicit rendezvous' are innocuous and open-ended couplings perpetuated by young girls looking for friendship, blind opportunity, or a free pass into some of Habana's best nightclubs.

Despite the island's generally lax attitude to sexual promiscuity, clampdowns in the sex trade can and do occur. The all-inclusive resort areas are particularly prone to police attention. In 1996 the authorities rounded up legions of prostitutes in Varadero and placed a barring order on the resort's paladares and casas particulares. As a result, the town lost an element of its essential Cuban character and tourism in the resort noticeably blipped.

Unfortunately the problems associated with the sex trade have also served to reinforce Cuba's rather unpleasant system of tourist 'apartheid.' Nearly all of the island's tourist-class hotels bar access to all Cuban guests to their rooms on the pretext that some of them might be *jineteras*. But while the tight laws that govern these institutions might have temporarily nipped the problem of outright prostitution in the bud, they have done little to foster the long-term betterment of Cuban-tourist relations.

available in the morning at big theaters and the Hotel Nacional. We've whittled the theater list down to these select few:

Acapulco (Map pp106-7; ☎ 833-9573; cnr Avs 26 & 35, Nuevo Vedado) Concerts and special events happen here too.

Cine 23 y 12 (Map pp106-7; ☎ 833-6906; cnr Calles 23 & 12)

Cine Actualidades (Map p100; ☎ 861-5193; Av de Bélgica No 262) Behind the Hotel Plaza.

Cine Charles Chaplin (Map pp106-7; ☎ 831-1101; Calle 23 No 1157 btwn Calles 10 & 12) Previews and special screenings and events happen at Icaic's theater; don't miss the poster gallery of great Cuban classic films here.

Cine La Rampa (Map pp106-7; ☎ 878-6146; Calle 23 No 111) Catch film festivals here (DeNiro, French films etc).

Cine Payret (Map p100; ☎ 863-3163; Paseo de Martí No 505) Opposite the Capitolio, this is Centro Habana's largest and most luxurious cinema, erected in 1878.

Cine Riviera (Map pp106-7; ☎ 830-9648; Calle 23 No 507) Big pop, rock and sometimes rap concerts happen here.

Cine Trianón (Map pp106-7; ☎ 830-9648; Línea No 706) Movies or live theater.

Cine Yara (Map pp106-7; ☎ 832-9430; cnr Calles 23 & L) One big screen and two video 'salas' (cinemas) here at Habana's most famous cinema (with the best popcorn).

Cinecito (Map p100; ☎ 863-8051; San Rafael No 68) Films for kids behind the Hotel Inglaterra.

Gay & Lesbian Habana

While there aren't any specific gay venues as yet, Habana's burgeoning gay scene is relatively open and there are plenty of cruising opportunities in Vedado. While the night is still young, most of the action takes place on the Malecón where up to 200 people congregate expectantly on the sea wall in front of the Hotel Nacional to shoot the breeze and find out about what's happening later on. Another smaller meeting point is outside Cine Yara on the corner of Calles 23 and L and in the streets and spaces surrounding the Coppelia.

Head to any of these spots on a Friday and Saturday night to find out about the private fiestas – spontaneous parties that are mostly gay, with a healthy dose of fag hags, bisexuals and friends thrown in. Habana's scene is renowned for its talented drag shows, although you'll rarely see transvestites flaunting it in public. A popular venue for bigger shindigs is Parque Lenin, a little removed from the center, but re-

putedly an excellent night out. There'll be plenty of people willing to pool in a taxi. As with other foreign-Cuban couplings, non-Cubans will often be expected to pick up the bill for drinks, taxis, etc when escorting Cuban partners to these places.

Sport

Estadio Latinoamericano (Map pp106-7; ☎ 870-6526; Zequiera No 312) From October to April (and into May if Habana's Industriales 'Los Azules' make it into the playoffs), baseball games happen at this 58,000-seat stadium in Cerro, just south of Centro Habana. Entry costs three pesos (but they like to charge foreigners CUC\$1). The Metropolitanos also play here, but they are to the Industriales what the Mets are to the Yankees. Games are 7:30pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 1:30pm Saturday and Sunday. Unfortunately, getting here by public transport is difficult. The benches are cement – painful after nine innings.

Ciudad Deportiva (Map pp106-7; ☎ 54 50 00; cnr Av de la Independencia & Vía Blanca; admission 5 pesos) 'Sport City' is Cuba's premier sports training center and big basketball, volleyball, boxing and track contests happen at the coliseum here. The M-2 camello (metrobus) from Av Bolívar in Centro Habana stops across the street.

Sala Polivalente Ramón Fonst (Map pp106-7; ☎ 881-4196; Av de la Independencia; 1 peso) Raucous basketball and volleyball games are held at this stadium opposite the main bus station.

For boxing, try **Kid Chocolate** (Map p100; ☎ 861-1546; Paseo de Martí), directly opposite the Capitolio, which usually hosts matches on Fridays at 7pm or **Gimnasio de Boxeo Rafael Trejo** (Map p94; ☎ 862-0266; Calle Cuba No 815 btwn Merced & Leonor Pérez, Habana Vieja). Here you can see matches on Friday at 7pm (CUC\$1) or drop by any day after 4pm to watch training. Travelers (including women) interested in boxing can find a trainer here.

Before you forget to pack your running shoes, let it be known that, with its ocean-side Malecón, Habana boasts one of the world's nicest municipal jogging routes. Keep your eyes out for holes in the pavement, splashing waves, *jineteros* and old men with fishing lines.

SHOPPING Art Galleries

The art scene in Habana is cutting edge and ever-changing and collectors, browsers and admirers will find many galleries in which to while away hours. Remember that you'll need official receipts or export permits to take artwork home with you (see the boxed text, p140). For gallery events, look for the free *Arte en La Habana*, a triquarterly listings flyer (the San Cristóbal agency on Plaza San Francisco de Asís usually has them) or visit www.galeriascubanas.com.

HABANA VIEJA

Casa de Carmen Montilla (☎ 33 87 68; Oficios No 164; ☎ 10:30am-5:30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) This gallery features a huge ceramic mural by Sosa Bravo in the pretty rear courtyard.

Estudio Galería Los Oficios (☎ 863-0497; Oficios No 166; ☎ 10am-5:30pm Mon-Sat) Pop in to this gallery to see the large, hectic, but intriguing canvasses by Nelson Domínguez, whose workshop is upstairs.

Taller de Serigrafía René Portocarrero (☎ 862-3276; Cuba No 513 btwn Brasil & Muralla; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Paintings and prints by young Cuban artists are exhibited and sold here (from CUC\$30 to CUC\$150). You can also see the artists at work.

CENTRO HABANA

Galería Origenes (☎ 863-6690; Paseo de Martí No 458; ☎ 9am-6pm) Paintings and sculptures are exhibited and sold at this gallery inside the Gran Teatro de La Habana, opposite Parque Central.

Galería La Acacia (☎ 861-3533; San Martín No 114 btwn Industria & Consulado; ☎ 10am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) This important gallery behind the Gran Teatro de La Habana has paintings by leading artists like Zaida del Río, plus antiques. Export permits are arranged.

VEDADO

Galería Ciudades del Mundo (☎ 832-3175; Calle 25 No 307; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Interesting exhibitions on Habana and other cities of the world are put up here.

Galería Habana (☎ 832-7101; Línea No 460 btwn Calles E & F; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This wonderful space in the heart of Vedado shows contemporary Cuban art in big, bright galleries. Come here to see what's new and different from artists such as Aimée García.

Galería Haydee Santamaría (Calle G), next to the Casa de las Américas, was being renovated at the time of writing. If it's still closed have a look at the gallery inside the **Casa de las Américas** (cnr Calles 3 & G; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10am-4:30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) which has fine exhibits featuring art from all over Latin America.

Other galleries worth a peek in Vedado are the **Centro de Arte 23 y 12** (cnr Calles 12 & 23; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) for contemporary Cuban art and the gallery at **Uneac** (cnr Calles 17 & H).

Shops & Markets

HABANA VIEJA

Palacio de la Artesanía (Cuba No 64; ☎ 9am-7pm) For one-stop shopping for souvenirs, cigars, crafts, musical instruments, CDs, clothing and jewelry at fixed prices, join the gaggle of tour-bus escapees here. This building is the former Palacio de Pedroso, erected by Habana Major Mateo Pedroso in 1780. In the mid-19th century it was Habana's high court and later its police headquarters.

Habana 1791 (Mercaderes No 156 btwn Obrapia & Lamparilla) A one-off store that specializes in old-fashioned perfumes concocted from aromatic flowers and plant oils. Nicely-presented gifts start at around CUC\$5.

Fería de la Artesanía (Tacón btwn Tejadillo & Chacón; ☎ Wed-Sat) Paintings, *guayaberas* (men's shirts), woodwork, leather items, Che everything, jewelry and more can be haggled over at this open-air handicraft market. If you buy paintings, make sure you arrange an export license (see the boxed text, p140) or risk losing your loot at customs upon leaving Cuba (if they're deemed 'national treasures' they'll be confiscated). Smaller artwork can easily be tucked safely in luggage.

Longina Música (☎ 862-8371; Obispo No 360 btwn Habana & Compostela; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) This place on the pedestrian mall has a good selection of CDs, plus musical instruments such as bongos, guitars, maracas, guiros and *tumbadoras* (conga drum). Shop around and you'll probably find cheaper instruments.

You can also check out the **Fundación Havana Club shop** (San Pedro No 262; ☎ 9am-9pm).

CENTRO HABANA

El Bulevar (San Rafael btwn Paseo de Martí & Av de Italia) This is a pedestrian mall and peso bazaar full of snacks and surprises.

EXPORTING ARTWORK

When buying art at an official outlet always ask for an official receipt to show Cuban customs, especially if the object won't fit in your suitcase. To discourage private trading, officials often confiscate undocumented artwork at the airport. If you've purchased a work of art at state-run galleries and have the receipts, you shouldn't have a problem, but it's always better to have a certificate to export artwork (and you'll definitely need one if you purchase directly from the artist).

Certificates to export artwork are issued by the **Registro Nacional de Bienes Culturales** (Map pp106-7; Calle 17 No 1009 btwn Calles 10 & 12, Vedado; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri). To obtain an export certificate you must bring the objects here for inspection; fill in a form; queue for two hours; pay a fee of between CUC\$10 to CUC\$30, which covers from one to five pieces of artwork; and return 24 hours later to pick up the certificate. Do not leave this bit of business until your last day. Some artists will offer to obtain the permit for you upon payment of a deposit. However, the only way to be sure that your paintings won't be confiscated at the airport is to obtain the permit yourself in person.

Variadas Galiano (cnr San Rafael & Av de Italia; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Exiting El Bulevar onto Av de Italia, you come to an equally important shopping strip for Cubans containing giant department stores including Variadas Galiano. This former Woolworth's has a great lunch and ice-cream counter and a wide selection of interesting stuff such as old records and those mesh tank tops you see everyone wearing.

La Manzana de Gómez (cnr Agramonte & San Rafael) This faded but elegant European-style covered shopping arcade built in 1910 is full of stores. La Exposición, in a downstairs corner, sells reproductions of the works of famous Cuban painters. Opposite the Plaza Hotel is El Orbe bike rentals.

Area de Vendedores por Cuenta Propia (Máximo Gómez No 259; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) This is a permanent flea market where you can pick up Santería beads, old books, leather belts and so on.

VEDADO

ARTex (cnr Calles 23 & L; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) This shop opposite the Hotel Habana Libre has a good selection of CDs, cassettes, books, crafts and postcards.

Fería de la Artesanía (Malecón btwn Calles D & E; ☎ from 10:30am, closed Wed) This artisan market has much of the same as its Habana Vieja counterpart with some key differences: the side facing Calle D is all handmade shoes and sandals, there's a whole section of numismatic interest, with old stamps, coins, bills and other ephemera and there are many more kitschy paintings for sale.

It's also a better set-up allowing for easier browsing.

Cine Yara (☎ 832-9430; cnr Calles 23 & L) A fabulous selection of old movie posters, antique postcards, T-shirts and, of course, all the greatest Cuban films on videotape are sold at this shop inside the theater.

Galerías de Paseo (cnr Calle 1 & Paseo; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) This shopping mall across from the Hotel Meliá Cohiba is the most upscale east of the Río Almendares, with Adidas, Chanel, and even a car dealership. There is also a Bim Bom ice-cream parlor too.

Plaza Carlos III (Av Salvador Allende btwn Arbol Seco & Retiro; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) After Plaza de las Américas in Varadero, this is probably Cuba's flashiest shopping mall – and there's barely a foreigner in sight. Step in on a Saturday and see the double economy working at a feverish pitch.

Photo Service (Vedado ☎ 33 50 31; Centro de Prensa Internacional, cnr Calles 23 & O; ☎ 8:30am-midnight; Vedado ☎ 55 39 74; Galerías de Paseo, cnr Calle 1 & Paseo; ☎ 9am-6pm) Two-hour film developing, photocopies, passport photos (CUC\$2 for four).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Take a number at the **Cubana Airlines** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 49 49; Calle 23 No 64; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat) bustling head office at the Malecón end of the Airline Building, where you can buy international or domestic tickets. If it's packed, book Cubana flights for the same price a few doors down at the helpful **Sol y Son Travel Agency** (Map pp106-

7; ☎ 33 02 93/4; fax 33 51 50; Calle 23 No 64 btwn Calle P & Infanta; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat).

Other airlines with domestic services:

Aerocaribbean (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 36 21; fax 33 38 71; Airline Building, Calle 23 No 64)

Aerotaxi (Map pp106-7; ☎ 53 53 48; fax 33 40 64; cnr Calles 27 & M, Vedado) Private charters only.

Boat

Buses connecting with the hydrofoil service to Isla de la Juventud leave at 9am from the **Terminal de Ómnibus** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 878-1841; cnr Av de la Independencia & Calle 19 de Mayo), near the Plaza de la Revolución, but often they're late. You'll be told to arrive at least an hour before the bus when you buy your ticket and it's best to take heed of this advice. Bus tickets are sold at the kiosk marked 'NCC' between gate Nos 9 and 10 in the middle of the departures hall (CUC\$2) though you're advised to buy a bus/boat ticket combined for CUC\$13 rather than waiting until you get to Surgidero de Batabanó. Bring your passport.

Bus

Astro buses to all corners of Cuba depart from the **Terminal de Ómnibus** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 870-9401; cnr Av de la Independencia & Calle 19 de Mayo) near the Plaza de la Revolución. Tickets sold in Cuban Convertibles are readily available at the office marked **Venta de Boletines** (☎ 870-3397; ☎ 24hr), down the hall to the right of the main entrance. Two seats on each bus are available for sales in Convertibles, and you can usually get one on any Astro bus the same day. The staff will take you right to your bus and help you board (no pushing in line). For departure information see below. Astro buses have no website and no printed schedule and times and prices are subject to change. On the upside, the company took possession of a whole new fleet of spanking new Chinese buses in December 2005 so conditions have improved.

Víazul (☎ 881-1413, 881-5652; www.viazul.com; cnr Calle 26 & Zoológico, Nuevo Vedado) covers most destinations of interest to travelers, in deluxe, air-conditioned coaches. You can

BUS TIMETABLE

Astro

Destination	Cost (one way)	Distance	Duration (hr)	Departure time
Cienfuegos	CUC\$17	254km	5	6:15am, noon, 4:15pm, 7:30pm, 9:15pm
Pinar del Río	CUC\$8	162km	4	8am, 12:30pm, 5pm, 8:20pm
Santa Clara	CUC\$15	276km	5	2:30am, 7:40pm
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$42	861km	15	12:15pm, 7:20pm
Trinidad	CUC\$17	335km	7½	5:45am
Varadero	CUC\$8	140km	3	4:35am

Víazul

Destination	Cost (one way)	Distance	Duration (hr)	Departure time
Cienfuegos	CUC\$20	254km	5	8:15am, 1pm
Holquín	CUC\$44	743km	10½	8:30pm
Pinar del Río	CUC\$11	162km	4	9am, 2pm
Playas del Este	CUC\$4	20km	½	8:40am, 2:20pm
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$51	861km	16	9:30am, 3pm, 10pm
Trinidad	CUC\$25	335km	6	8:15am, 1pm
Varadero	CUC\$10	140km	3	8am, 12pm, 2pm, 6pm
Vinales	CUC\$12	189km	3¼	9am

board at the inconveniently located terminal 3km southwest of Plaza de la Revolución, or at the Terminal de Ómnibus. Here tickets for Viazul services are sold immediately prior to the departure in the Venta de Boletines office. You can get full schedules on the website or at **Infotur** (Map p100; Obispo btwn Bernaza & Villegas), which also sells tickets requiring you to board at its originating station in Nuevo Vedado.

Habana-bound, you can get off the Viazul bus from Varadero/Matanzas in Centro Habana right after the tunnel, but if you arrive from most other points you'll be let out at the Nuevo Vedado terminal. From here city bus 27 will take you to Vedado or Centro Habana (ask). Otherwise, if your bus stops at the Terminal de Ómnibus on Av de la Independencia, jump off there. The M-2 camello stops in front of the terminal along with many other buses en route to Parque Fraternidad in Centro Habana. The local buses won't accommodate backpacks. See the boxed text, p141, for departure information.

The bus to Santiago de Cuba (CUC\$51, 16 hours 10 minutes) also stops at Santa Clara (CUC\$18, three hours 40 minutes), Sancti Spiritus (CUC\$23, five hours 40 minutes), Ciego de Ávila (CUC\$27, seven hours), Camagüey (CUC\$33, eight hours 50 minutes), Las Tunas (CUC\$39, 11 hours 25 minutes), Holguín (CUC\$44, 12 hours 40 minutes) and Bayamo (CUC\$44, 14 hours).

Any of the tour buses parked near the Palacio de la Artesanía (Cuba No 64) near the cathedral, will happily take you to Varadero in the afternoon for CUC\$10 to CUC\$20 per person. Just ask the driver.

Buses to points in the Habana Province leave from Apodaca No 53, off Agramonte, near the main railway station. They go to Güines, Jaruco, Madruga, Nueva Paz, San José, San Nicolás and Santa Cruz del Norte, but expect large crowds and come early to get a peso ticket.

Taxi

Small Lada taxis, operated by Cubataxi, park on Calle 19 de Mayo beside the Terminal de Ómnibus. They charge approximately CUC\$44 to Varadero, CUC\$54 to Pinar del Río, CUC\$75 to Santa Clara, CUC\$85 to Cienfuegos, CUC\$100 to Trinidad. Up to

four people can go for that price. It's worth considering in a pinch and is perfectly legal.

Train

Trains to most parts of Cuba depart from **Estación Central de Ferrocarriles** (Map p100; ☎ 862-4971, 861-8540; cnr Av de Bélgica & Arsenal), on the southwestern side of Habana Vieja. Foreigners must buy tickets in Convertibles at La Coubre station (☎ 862-1006; cnr Av del Puerto & Desamparados; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri). If it's closed, try the Lista de Espera office adjacent which sells tickets for trains leaving immediately. Kids under 12 travel half-price. Rail services include:

Destination	Cost (one way)	Distance	Frequency
Bayamo	CUC\$26	744km	3 weekly
Camagüey	CUC\$19/32	534km	1 daily
Ciego de Ávila	CUC\$16/22	435km	3 daily
Cienfuegos	CUC\$11	254km	3 weekly
Holguín	CUC\$27	743km	1 daily
Las Tunas	CUC\$23	652km	2 daily
Manzanillo	CUC\$28	775km	3 weekly
Matanzas	CUC\$4	105km	8 daily
Morón	CUC\$24	446km	3 weekly
Pinar del Río	CUC\$6.50	162km	1 daily
Sancti Spiritus	CUC\$13.50	354km	1 daily
Santa Clara	CUC\$14/17	276km	4 daily
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$30/50/62	861km	2-3 daily

The above information is only a rough approximation of what should happen; services are routinely delayed or canceled. Always double-check scheduling and from which terminal your train will leave.

For information about the electric train from Casablanca to Matanzas, see p163. Suburban trains and local services to points within the Habana Province are discussed under Getting Around, following.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí is at Rancho Boyeros, 25km southwest of Habana via Av de la Independencia. There are several terminals here. Terminal No 1, on the southeastern side of the runway, handles only domestic Cubana flights. Three kilometers away, via Av de la Independencia, is the dreaded Terminal No 2, which receives

Corsair flights and charters from Miami. All other international flights use Terminal No 3, a modern facility at Wajay, 2.5km west of Terminal No 2. Charter flights on Aerocaribbean, Aerogaviota, Aerotaxi etc, to Cayo Largo del Sur and elsewhere use the Caribbean Terminal (also known as Terminal No 5), at the northwestern end of the runway, 2.5km west of Terminal No 3. (Terminal No 4 hasn't been built yet.) Check carefully which terminal you'll be using.

Viazul (☎ 881-5652; www.viazul.com; cnr Calle 26 & Zoológico, Nuevo Vedado) has a very sporadic service to the airport at around 6pm-ish (CUC\$3) from their Nuevo Vedado terminal and the Hotel Plaza on Parque to Terminal 3. Don't rely on it and certainly don't turn up without checking first.

To/From the Bus Terminal

The crowded M-2 Metro Bus from Santiago de las Vegas stops outside the Terminal de Ómnibus and runs directly to Parque de la Fraternidad near the Capitolio. In the other direction ask someone where to get out, as the southbound M-2 stops across the Plaza de la Revolución, out of sight of the bus station.

Bici-taxi

Two-seater bici-taxis will take you anywhere around Centro Habana for CUC\$1/2 for a short/long trip, after bargaining. It's a lot more than a Cuban would pay, but cheaper and more fun than a tourist taxi. Laws prohibit bici-taxis from taking tourists and they may wish to go via a round-about route through the back streets to avoid police controls – a cheap tour! If they get stopped, it's their problem, not yours.

Bicycle & Moped

After years in the two-wheeled wilderness, travelers now have the opportunity to hire decent bikes from a new outlet called **El Orbe** (Map p94; ☎ 860-2617; cnr Monserrate & Ignacio Agramonte; ☎ 9:30am-4:40pm Mon-Sat) in the La Manzana de Gómez shopping center in Habana Vieja. This excellent shop rents out class bikes (many are Raleighs) imported from Canada with 21 gears and shimano brakes. They also have a supply of helmets and bike locks, as well as an on-site mechanic who'll fix up your bike for free.

Prices are as follows: one hour (CUC\$2), one day (CUC\$12), two to seven days (CUC\$8 a day), seven days (CUC\$60), 10 days (CUC\$75).

Boat

Passenger ferries (Map p94; ☎ 867-3726) shuttle across the harbor to Regla and Casablanca, leaving every 10 or 15 minutes from Muelle Luz, corner of San Pedro and Santa Clara, on the southeast side of Habana Vieja. The fare is a flat 10 centavos. Since the ferries were hijacked to Florida in 1994 (and later returned) and again in 2003 (the hijackers never made it outside Cuban waters), security has been tightened. Expect bag searches and screening.

Car

There are lots of car rental offices in Habana, so if you're told there are no cars or there isn't one in your price range just try another office or agency. All agencies have offices at Terminal 3 at Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí. Here's a quick in-town list:

Cubacar (☎ 33 22 77) Desks at the following hotels: Meliá Cohiba, Meliá Habana, NH Parque Central, Habana Libre, Comodoro and Bello Caribe.

Havanaautos Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 34 84; cnr Calles 23 & M); Playa (Map pp146-7; ☎ 204-3203; cnr Av 5 & Calle 112) Desks at the Habana Libre, Nacional, Riviera, Nacional, Complejo Neptuno-Tritón and Deauville hotels.

Micar Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 24 24 44; Galerías de Paseo, cnr Calle 1 & Paseo; ☎ 24hr); Vedado (Map pp106-7; cnr Calle 23 & Infanta) Micar has one or two super cheapie cars (CUC\$35 per day); but gets complaints about car quality (often knock-offs from other agencies) and customer service. Go in person and size them up.

Rex Rent a Car (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 77 88; cnr Línea & Malecón) Fancy cars.

Transtur Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 33 40 38; cnr Calles 21 & N); Vedado (Map pp106-7; ☎ 55 32 52; Calle 25 btwn Calles K & L) Desks at the Ambos Mundos, Copacabana, Deauville, Inglaterra, Nacional, Neptuno-Tritón, Panamericano, Plaza, Riviera and Sevilla hotels. Transtur and Havanaautos offices in Habana tend not to have the cheaper models you can find in other cities.

Via Rent a Car (☎ 204-3606; cnr Avs 47 & 36, Kohly)

Servi-Cupet gas stations are in Vedado at Calles L and 17; Malecón and Calle 15; Malecón and Paseo, near the Riviera and Meliá Cohiba hotels; and on Av de la Independencia (northbound lane) south of Plaza de la Revolución. All are open 24 hours a day.

Guarded parking is available for approximately CUC\$1 all over Habana including in front of the Hotel Sevilla, in front of the Hotel Inglaterra and Hotel Nacional.

Colectivos

All those beautiful hulks parked in front of the Capitolio are 'colectivos' – collective taxis that hold six or more people and run on fixed routes. They're not supposed to take tourists, but many will, typically asking CUC\$2 for the Centro Habana–Vedado run; a trip that costs Cubans 10 pesos.

Public Transport

BUS

Habana's local bus service is either improving slightly or going straight to hell, depending on who you ask. Regular city buses are called guaguas (pronounced 'WA was'), while the much larger Metro Buses are camellos (camels) for their two humps. Within the city the fare is a flat 20 centavos in a camello, and 40 centavos in a regular bus, which you must toss into a box near the driver or pay to a conductor who's also by necessity an excellent contortionist. Unfortunately, no bus-route map is available.

There are *colas* (lines) at most *paradas* (bus stops) even though it may not appear so at first glance. To mark your place ask for *el último* (the last in line), and when the bus arrives get behind that person. This excellent, efficient system is (mostly) rigorously followed, with *cola*-breakers taken to task by their compatriots.

Since 1995 the public-transport crisis in Habana has been eased by the introduction of Metro Buses: huge 300-plus passenger buses hauled by trucks. Color-coded, they all have the prefix M before their number:

M-1 Alamar–Vedado via Parque de la Fraternidad (pink)

M-2 Parque de la Fraternidad–Santiago de las Vegas (blue)

M-3 Alamar–Ciudad Deportiva (orange)

M-4 Parque de la Fraternidad–San Agustín via Marianao (green)

M-5 Vedado–San Agustín (red)

M-6 Calvario–Vedado (cnr 21 & L; beige)

M-7 Parque de la Fraternidad–Alberro via Cotorro (red – they ran out of colors)

As you can see, many of the Metro Buses leave from Parque de la Fraternidad on

the southern side of the Capitolio in Centro Habana. At the originating places of these buses there will be two lines, one for *sentados* (people who want a seat) and another for *parados* (those willing to stand). The second line moves faster and is best if you're only going a short distance and have no luggage. There is sometimes a third line for *embarazadas* (pregnant women).

The camello is known as the 'Saturday night movie' because it contains sex, violence and adult language (the warning that precedes the weekend movie on Cuban TV). It can be intimidating at first. Expect to be crushed by the crowd.

TRAIN

Cristina Station (Map pp106-7; ☎ 878-4971; cnr Av de México & Arroyo, Cuatro Caminos) lies south of Centro Habana and about a kilometer southwest of the train station. It handles local trains within the city limits. Trains to Batabanó leave twice a day (2½ hours), and four trains a day go to Wajay (one hour). In July and August only, there's a train from here to Guanabo three times a day except Monday (1½ hours). There are also daily trains to Artemisa and Güines. Cristina was the first train station built in Habana, and it's worth checking out if you're spending some time in Habana and want to get around cheaply.

19 de Noviembre Train Station (Map pp106-7; ☎ 881-4431; Tulipán, Nuevo Vedado) has trains to a couple of points in the Habana Province, including six to San Antonio de los Baños (one hour). There's railcar service to Expo-Cuba (40 minutes) at 9:30am Wednesday to Sunday.

Taxi

Metered tourist taxis are readily available at all of the upscale hotels, with the air-con Nissan taxis charging higher tariffs than the nonair-con Ladas. The cheapest official taxis are operated by **Panataxi** (☎ 55 55 55), costing CUC\$1 flagfall, then CUC\$0.50 a kilometer. Tourist taxis charge CUC\$1 a kilometer and can be ordered from **Havanautos Taxi** (☎ 32 32 32), **Turistaxi** (☎ 33 66 66) and **Transgaviota** (☎ 33 97 80). **Taxi OK** (☎ 204-0000) is based in Miramar. Drivers of the tourist taxis are government employees who work for a peso salary.

The cheapest taxis are the older yellow-and-black Ladas, which are state-owned

but rented out to private operators. They won't wish to use their meters, as these are set at an unrealistically low rate, but you can bargain over the fare. They're not supposed to pick up passengers within 100m of a tourist hotel.

Private pirate taxis with yellow license plates are a bit cheaper, but you must agree on the fare before getting into the car, and carry exact change. There are usually classic-car taxis parked in front of the Inglaterra.

OUTER HABANA

Splaying out on three sides from the downtown district, Habana's suburbs are full of quirky and easy-to-reach sights and activities that can make interesting day and half-day trips from the city center. Playa boasts a decent aquarium, top-class conference facilities and Cuba's best restaurants; Guanabacoa and Regla are famous for their Afro-Cuban religious culture, and the bay-side forts of La Cabaña and El Morro exhibit some of the island's most impressive military architecture.

PLAYA & MARIANAO

The municipality of Playa, west of Vedado across the Río Almendares, is a paradoxical mix of prestigious residential streets and tough proletarian housing schemes.

Gracious Miramar is a leafy neighborhood of broad avenues and weeping laurel trees where the traffic moves more sedately and diplomat's wives – clad in sun-visors and Lycra leggings – go for gentle afternoon jogs along Av Quinta (Fifth Avenue). Many of Habana's foreign embassies are housed here in old prerevolution mansions, and business travelers and conference attendees flock in from around the globe to make use of some of Cuba's grandest and most luxurious facilities. If you're interested primarily in sightseeing and entertainment, commuting to Vedado or Habana Vieja is a nuisance and an expense. However, some of the best salsa clubs, discos and restaurants are out this way and the *casas particulares* are positively luxurious.

Cubanacán plays host to many of Habana's business or scientific fairs and

conventions, and it is also where several specialized medical institutes are situated. Despite the austerity of the *período especial*, vast resources have been plowed into biotechnological and pharmaceutical research institutes in this area. Yachties, anglers and scuba divers will find themselves using the Marina Hemingway at Playa's west end. Marianao is world famous for the Tropicana Nightclub, but locally it's known as a tough, in parts rough, neighborhood with a powerful Santería community and a long history of social commitment.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Hotel Business Centers (Hotel Meliá Habana; Av 3 btwn Calles 76 & 80) Meliá Habana charges CUC\$7 per half-hour for Internet access.

MEDIA

The best **newsstand** in Habana is in the parking lot of **Supermercado 70** (cnr Av 3 & Calle 70; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat). You can usually get *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Economist*, and *Rolling Stone* here.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Clinica Central Cira García (☎ 204-2811; fax 24 16 33; Calle 18A No 4101, Playa) Emergency, dental and medical consultations for foreigners (consultations CUC\$25 to CUC\$35).

Farmacia Internacional (☎ 204-9385; Hotel El Comodoro, cnr Av 3 & Calle 84)

Pharmacy (☎ 204-2880; Calle 18A No 4104, Playa; ☎ 24hr) In Clínica Central Cira García; one of the city's best, along with the pharmacy across the street on the corner of Calle 20 and Av 41 (open 9am to 8:45pm).

MONEY

Banco Financiero Internacional Miramar (☎ 203-9762; Sierra Maestra Bldg, cnr Av 1 & Calle 0); Playa (☎ 267-5500; cnr Av 5 & Calle 92)

Cadeca Miramar (Av 5A btwn Calles 40 & 42; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun); Playa (cnr Av 3 & Calle 70)

POST

DHL (☎ 204-1578; cnr Av 1 & Calle 26, Miramar; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Post office (Calle 42 No 112 btwn Avs 1 & 3, Miramar; ☎ 8am-11:30am, 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11:30am Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Infotur (☎ 24 70 36; cnr Av 5 & Calle 112, Playa; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8:30am-noon Sun)

PLAYA & MARIANAO

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TRAVEL AGENCIES

All of the following agencies sell the organized tours listed previously (p92).

Cubanacán (☎ 204-6970; cnr Av 3 & Calle 84, Miramar; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Also with desks at Hotel Bello Caribe, Hotel Mellá Habana and Complejo Neptuno-Tritón.

Gaviota (☎ 204-4411; fax 204-4111; cnr Av 49 & 36)

Havanatur (☎ 204-7541; Sierra Maestra Bldg, cnr Av 1 & Calle 0; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Sights

MIRAMAR

The fascinating museum at the **Fundación Naturaleza y El Hombre** (☎ 204-0438; Av 5B No 6611 btwn Calles 66 & 70; admission CUC\$3; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) displays artifacts from the 17,422km canoe trip from the Amazon source to sea led by Cuban intellectual and nature-lover Antonio Nuñez Jiménez in 1987. There's the canoe in which they made the trip, of course, but there are also headdresses, weapons and adornments used by indigenous communities the team encountered, plus, scores of ceramic figurines in all stages and positions of sexual arousal; the 'Latin American Kamasutra.' The Fundación itself is mind-blowing, with one of Cuba's largest photography collections, plus all the titles written by Nuñez Jiménez, (he was damn prolific), the famous Fidel portrait by Guayasamín, stalactites in the foyer and 'the glass house,' glass cases collecting all kinds of intriguing ephemera from the founder's life. This is a working foundation; you must call ahead to set up a museum visit.

Cubans are wild for scale models and **La Maqueta de la Habana** (☎ 202-7303; Calle 28 No 113 btwn Aves 1 & 3; student/unguided/guided CUC\$1/3/4; ☎ 9:30am-5pm Tue-Sat) is the biggest and best of them all: a huge 1:1000 scale model of Habana that measures 22m long and 8m wide. It's one of the largest scale models in the world and you can rent binoculars to check out all the color-coded buildings, parks and monuments. See also p96 for the scale model of Habana Vieja. Nearby, the two **parks** on Av 5, between Calles 24 and 26, with their immense banyan trees and dark lanes, are an atmospheric pocket.

The **Acuario Nacional** (☎ 202-5872; cnr Av 3 & Calle 62; adult/child CUC\$5/3; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun) is a Habana institution founded in 1960 that gets legions of annual visitors, particularly since its 2002 revamp. Environmentally

speaking, this place leaves all other Cuban *acuarios* (aquatic centers) and *definarios* (dolphin shows) in the shade. For a start, it's designed to be both educational and conservationist. Saltwater fish are the specialty, but there are also sea lions, dolphins and lots of running-around room for kids. Dolphin performances are almost hourly from 11am, with the final show at 9pm; admission includes the show.

That Stalinist obelisk that dominates the skyline halfway down Fifth Ave is the **Russian Embassy** (Av 5 No 6402 btwn Calles 62 & 66). More aesthetically pleasing is the domed **Iglesia Jesús de Miramar** (cnr Av 5 & Calle 82), a gigantic neo-Romanesque church.

MARIANAO

The former Cuartel Colombia military airfield at Marianao is now a school complex called **Ciudad Libertad**. Pass through the gate to visit the inspiring **Museo de la Alfabetización** (☎ 260-8054; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon, 1-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), which describes the 1961 literacy campaign, when 100,000 youths aged 12 to 18 spread out across Cuba to teach reading and writing to farmers, workers and the aged. In the center of the traffic circle, opposite the entrance to the complex, is a tower in the form of a syringe in memory of Carlos Juan Finlay, who discovered the cause of yellow fever in 1881.

CUBANACÁN

The leading art academy in Cuba is the **Instituto Superior de Arte** (ISA; Calle 120 No 1110), established in the former Habana Country Club here in 1961, and elevated to the status of institute in 1976. The Faculty of Music occupies the original country-club building, and after the revolution a number of other facilities were erected on the site of the former 18-hole championship golf course. This cluster of buildings, some unfinished, some half-restored, but all gloriously graceful due to the arches, domes and profuse use of red brick, was the brainchild of Che Guevara and a team of architects. Among them was Richard Porro, who designed the striking Faculty of Plastic Arts (1961) with long curving passageways and domed halls in the shape of a reclining woman. Across a small stream from the main building is the Faculty of Theater and Dance. Some 800 students study here, and foreigners can

too (see p114). It is accessible only from the northwest.

Also known as the Habana Convention Center, the **Palacio de las Convenciones** (☎ 20 60 11; Calle 146 btwn Aves 11 & 13) is one of Cuba's most dramatic modern buildings. Built for the Non-aligned Conference in 1979, the four-interconnecting halls contain a state-of-the-art auditorium with 2101 seats and 11 smaller halls. The 589-member National Assembly meets here twice a year and the complex hosts more than 50,000 conference attendees annually. Not far from here is **Pabexpo** (☎ 54 91 11; cnr Av 17 & Calle 180), just two blocks off Av 5. Opened in 1987, Pabexpo's 20,000 sq meters of exhibition space in four interconnecting pavilions is filled with about 15 business or scientific shows a year. Cubadisco (Cuba's Grammys) are held here each May.

Many of Cuba's cutting-edge scientific and medical facilities are out here including: **Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología** (☎ 271-6022; cnr Av 31 & Calle 190), the focus of Cuba's genetic engineering and biotechnology research; the **Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas** (Cenic; ☎ 208-2546; cnr Av 25 & Calle 158), where the anticholesterol wonder drug Ateromixol, or PPG, was created; and the **Centro Internacional de Restauración Neurológica** (Ciren; ☎ 271-6844; cnr Av 25 & Calle 158), where Cuba has developed breakthrough neurological treatments. All these installations are heavily guarded, so unless you're a patient, don't even think about visiting.

Museo del Aire (☎ 271-0632; Calle 212 btwn Aves 29 & 31, La Coronela; unguided/guided CUC\$2/3, plus camera CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) has 22 planes and helicopters on display, most of them ex-military aircraft. Don't miss Che Guevara's personal Cessna 310, or the space suit used by Cuba's first cosmonaut.

Activities

There are many water activities available at Marina Hemingway in Barlovento, 20km west of central Habana. Deep-sea fishing can be arranged at **Cubanacán Náutica** (☎ 204-6848; cnr Av 5 & Calle 248) from CUC\$150 for four anglers for four hours depending on the boat. Included are a captain, sailor, open bar and tackle. Marlin season is June to October. Scuba packages for CUC\$35 per dive and tours of Habana's littoral can also

be arranged. Hotel tour desks should also be able to arrange these things.

La Aguja Marlin Diving Center (☎ 204-5088; cnr Av 5ta & 248, Santa Fe), between Cubanacán Náutica and the shopping center, offers scuba diving for CUC\$30 per dive, plus CUC\$5 for gear. It has one morning and one afternoon departure. A diving excursion to Varadero or Playa Girón can also be arranged. Reader reviews have been favorable.

Sleeping

MIRAMAR

Hostal Costa Sol (☎ 202-8269; Calle 60 No 307, Miramar; s/d CUC\$25/36) Operated by the Ministerio de Educación Superior, this is an intimate place with only 11 rooms, but is far from everything. The restaurant is cheap and decent if you happen to be out this way.

Residencia Universitaria Ispjae (☎ 203-6633; cnr Av 1 & Calle 22; s/d CUC\$27/44) Miramar's rock-bottom place is hard to pick out on the rocky shoreline just west of Teatro Karl Marx. There are eight basic rooms with baths that are usually booked up by foreigners studying with UniversiTUR (☎ 203-5370); call the hotel before rolling up.

Hotel Mirazul (☎ 204-0088/45; Av 5 No 3603 btwn Calles 36 & 40; s/d CUC\$45/50; ☎) An elegant old mansion operated as a hotel by the Ministerio de Educación Superior. The eight air-con rooms with baths and TVs are all different, so look first. There's a restaurant-bar. It's excellent value compared with the larger tourist hotels found here, but not always available; call ahead.

Hotel El Bosque (Gaviota; ☎ 204-9232; Calle 28A btwn 49A & 49B; s/d CUC\$45/60; ☎) A rank outsider, El Bosque is often overlooked by less savvy travelers who prefer to flock toward Miramar's ever popular strip of four- and five-star piles. Their loss is somebody else's gain. This clean, friendly and genteel hotel lies on the banks of the Río Almendares – Habana's green lungs – and is a good (and rare) midrange choice in this neck of the woods. Rooms are small but functional, there's 24-hour Internet, and out back a pleasant terrace overlooks the wooded slopes of the nearby river.

Aparthotel Montehabana (Gaviota; ☎ 206-9595; Calle 70 btwn Av 5A & 7; s/d/tr CUC\$50/70/100; ☎) This brand new Gaviota giant opened in December 2005 and consists of

101 one-room apartments with living room and fully-equipped kitchen. If you're not up to cooking the restaurant does a CUC\$8 breakfast and a CUC\$15 dinner buffet. Facilities are shiny and new and from the outside you could mistake this three-star establishment for a full-blown five-star.

Hotel El Comodoro (Cubanacán; ☎ 204-5551; cnr Av 3 & Calle 84; s/d low season CUC\$65/90, high season CUC\$80/110; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Right on the coast, about 15km west of Habana Vieja, this complex is a maze of shops, restaurants and accommodation, both old and new. The 134 rooms in the main four-story building date from before the revolution; another 10 rooms in a two-story cabana block facing the ocean cost the same. You're better off paying about 10% more for one of the Bungalows Alborada or Pleamar, which are fairly new. The hotel's small, sandy beach is protected from the waves by a large iron seawall, and the Comodoro is a good choice for anyone looking for real resort atmosphere within a taxi ride of the city.

Hotel Chateau Miramar (Cubanacán; ☎ 24 19 51/2/3; Av 1 btwn Calles 60 & 70; s/d CUC\$90/120; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Marketed as a 'boutique hotel' and considering neighboring properties, this hotel, with only five floors and 50 rooms, does have a more intimate feel. But 'chateau' and 'boutique' are a bit of a stretch. Still, professionals will appreciate the free cell phone, computer connection and direct international phone service that come with rooms.

CASAS PARTICULARES – PLAYA & MIRAMAR

Marta Rodríguez (☎ 203-8596; Calle 42 No 914; r CUC\$40; ☎) Rents two outfitted rooms with TV/VCR, stereo and fridge.

Mayda Bellón Trueba (☎ 203-4490; Av 33 No 3404 btwn Calles 34 & 36, Playa; r CUC\$30) Opposite Los Cactus de 33. Palatial, private. English spoken. Nine houses renting on this tranquil block, allowing big groups to arrange casa accommodation together.

Rina & Geraldo (☎ 202-4112; Av 3A No 8610 btwn 86 & 88, Miramar; r CUC\$25-30) Two clean rooms, one with sun terrace. Flexible hosts.

Suites Olimpia Jorge Pérez (☎ /fax 202-4126; Calle 96 No 535 btwn Avs 5F & 7, Miramar; r CUC\$30-35; ☎) Fridge. Private.

Panorama Hotel Havana (Gaviota; ☎ 204-0100; cnr Av 3 & Calle 70; s/d CUC\$95/120; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) One of Miramar's newest hotels, which opened in spring 2003, is an architectural oddity with hectares of glass and a huge ostentatious lobby that stands as a kind of cathedral to bad taste. Still, the 317 rooms are spacious and comfortable enough and a rooftop bar-restaurant offers great views all the way over to Vedado. Suites have terraces and whirlpools and the fantastic pool is right on the ocean. Kids under 12 stay for half price.

Occidental Miramar (Gaviota; ☎ 204-3584; fax 204-3583; cnr Av 5 & Calle 74; s/d CUC\$100/130; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Formerly the Novotel, this 427 room giant was recently taken over by Gaviota and has benefited as a result. Professional staff, great business facilities, and high standards of service throughout are par for the course here. A regular shuttle bus whizzes guests into Central Habana.

Hotel Meliá Habana (Cubanacán; ☎ 204-8500; Av 3 btwn Calles 76 & 80; r CUC\$225; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The pros choice; what the Meliá lacks in old-world charm it makes up for in razor-sharp professionalism. While some of Habana's flagship hotels suffer from a standard staple of annoying 'Cubanisms' (bored staff, iffy food, shoddy workmanship) this place, on the rocky shores of breezy Playa, rarely misses a beat. Don't be put off by the dull-grey facade, the facilities inside are beautiful, including a vine-draped lobby and a succession of nicely laid out swimming pools. A great business center and tremendous food seal the deal.

CUBANACÁN

Hotel Bello Caribe (Cubanacán; ☎ 33 05 67; cnr Av 31 & Calle 158; s/d low season CUC\$45/64, high season CUC\$55/78; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A couple of kilometers south of Hotel Palco, next to the huge Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología. The 120 rooms are generally used by foreigners undergoing treatment at the nearby medical facilities. Though this place is inconveniently located, we've received favorable letters about the facilities and services; there is a good buffet and salad bar.

MARINA HEMINGWAY

Hotel El Viejo y El Mar (Cubanacán; ☎ 204-6336; fax 204-6823) Lured by the Hemingway connection (the name is taken from Papa's Nobel

Prize-winning book: *The Old Man and the Sea*) El Viejo has disappointed many an unassuming punter. Even more so at the moment as it's closed to the general public for Misión Milagros (p449); call ahead to check current status.

Eating

Playa is paladar heaven and contains some of the best places to eat in Cuba. Food, ambience and culinary creativity are never in short supply in this neck of the woods and could have you seriously retracting all of those oft-told jokes about tomato-less pizzas and soggy cheese and ham sandwiches. Get out there and enjoy it while you can.

PLAYA & MARIANAO

La Flora (☎ 209-5889; cnr Av 41 & Calle 68, Playa) Unique in Habana, catch a colectivo on Calle 23 in Vedado to visit this bakery selling whole wheat bread (*¡sí señor!*), brownies, éclairs, cinnamon-raisin buns and other sweet treats – in Convertibles of course. It claims to be 24 hours.

La Paila (☎ 267-1771; Ave 51A No 8827 btwn Calles 88B & 88C, Marianao; ☎ noon-midnight) If this place wasn't so off the beaten track, it would be in Habana's Top Five; and it's cheap too. With just a few tables ensconced in a lush garden replete with soft-lit lanterns, this is the most romantic paladar no one knows about. And the food is infallible. They do a great *bistec Uruguayo* (steak) or try one of the famous pizzas – both less than CUC\$5. The menu is in pesos, but they take Convertibles.

El Elegante (☎ 203-8215; Av 33 No 3410 btwn 34 & 36, Playa) Humble El Elegante is good value, and it's open 'whenever you want it to be.'

Paladar Los Cactus de 33 (☎ 203-5139; Av 33 No 3405 btwn Calles 34 & 36, Playa; ☎ noon-midnight) Reviewed in international lifestyle magazines and used as a setting for TV specials, this place has impeccable service, elegant surroundings, well-prepared food and (in a Cuban context) outrageous prices. A full pork meal with all the sides is pushing CUC\$20, the house special chicken breast with mushrooms, olives and cheese even more.

MIRAMAR

Pan.com (☎ 204-4232; cnr Av 7 & Calle 26; ☎ 10am-midnight) You can't help but love this place with its hearty sandwiches, fantastic burg-

ers and ice-cream milkshakes to die for. Seating is in a shaded outdoor patio and service is surprisingly warm and efficient; the ultimate Habana comfort-food haven.

Dos Gardenias (☎ 204-2353; cnr Av 7 & Calle 28; ☎ noon-midnight) You can choose from grill, Chinese and pasta restaurants in this complex; also a bolero hot spot.

Paladar Mi Jardín (☎ 203-4627; Calle 66 No 517; ☎ noon-midnight) It's the rare Cuban menu that offers chicken mole or tacos and quesadillas, which makes this Mexican place a keeper. Dining beneath the vine-covered trellis in the garden is recommended, as is the house special fish Veracruz.

Paladar Calle 10 (☎ 205-3970; Calle 10 No 314 btwn Avs 3 & 5; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-11pm) Hidden in a back garden, the specialty here is outstandingly delicious barbecue: the lamb skewers marinated in oregano (CUC\$8ish) just might be the tastiest meat to pass your lips in Cuba, while the exotic red snapper stuffed with seafood and flambéed with rum is out of this world. The kitchen is wide open so you can watch and learn. Italian, French and English spoken. Reservations recommended.

Paladar La Fontana (☎ 202-8337; Calle 3A No 305) Habana discovers the barbecue or, more to the point, the full-on charcoal grill. Huge portions of meat and fish are served up in this amiable villa-cum-paladar, so go easy on the starters which include crab mixed with eggplant, quails eggs and fried chick peas. La Fontana specializes in just about everything you'll never see elsewhere in Cuba from lasagna to huge steaks. Big shot reviews from *Cigar Aficionado* and the *Chicago Tribune* testify the burgeoning legend.

La Esperanza (☎ 202-4361; Calle 16 No 105 btwn Avs 1 & 3; ☎ 6:30-11pm, closed Thu) This lovely home on a Miramar side street is worth a special trip. The well-prepared and well-presented food is served by wonderfully friendly staff in antique outfitted dining rooms or a leafy backyard. Reservations are advised, but not to worry if you have to wait; the couches, coffee-table books and a glass of fine wine will keep you occupied.

Don Cangrejo (☎ 204-4169; Av 1 No 1606 btwn Calles 16 & 18; ☎ noon-midnight) Right on the water, this seafood restaurant (fish CUC\$8 to CUC\$12 or lobster CUC\$20 to CUC\$25) scores high points for atmosphere (love the

buccaneer waitstaff!). There's a pool table and pool, an inexpensive pizza and grill menu and one of Habana's classic signs out front.

El Tocatoro (☎ 202-4530; Calle 18 No 302; meals CUC\$12-35; ☎ noon-midnight) Considered one of Habana's finest restaurants, be prepared to open your billfold at this place. Fried fish, lobster tail or a live lobster plucked from the tank is just the beginning. Everything, even the bread and rice, is à la carte, and 10% is added on top. The candlelit tables and garden are plusses, but don't believe the hype.

Supermercado 70 (cnr Av 3 & Calle 70; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Still known as the 'Diplomercado' from the days when you had to show a foreign passport to be able to shop here, this place is gigantic. One of the best in Habana with lots of selection.

If you're staying in one of the pricey hotels and want a cheaper place to eat than what the hotels offer, there's the **Cafetería de 3 y 62** (☎ 204-0369; cnr Av 3 & Calle 62; ☎ 8am-11pm), on the eastern side of the Russian Embassy. There is also a row of simple restaurant kiosks facing Supermercado 70.

CUBANACÁN

El Buganvil (☎ 271-4791; Calle 190 No 1501 btwn Calles 15 & 17, Siboney; ☎ noon-midnight) Another solid paladar with a pleasant outdoor plant and thatch setting, this place has sterling service and good *comida criolla*. The house specialty is *loma ahumado* (smoked pork loin; CUC\$4), but if you get a group of six or together, they'll smoke a whole pig for you.

La Cecilia (☎ 204-1562; Av 5 No 11010 btwn Calles 110 & 112; ☎ noon-midnight) All-time Habana classic, this classy place is up there with the Aljibe in terms of food quality (check out the *ropa vieja*), but trumps all comers with its big band music that blasts out on weekend nights inside its large but atmospheric courtyard.

El Rancho Palco (cnr Av 19 & Calle 140; ☎ noon-11pm) An upscale place, in a forest near the Palacio de las Convenciones. Steaks, seafood and Cuban cooking are served under a thatched roof.

La Ferminia (☎ 33 67 86; Av 5 No 18207) Habana gets swanky. Dine in the mansion or out in the garden patio at this fine restaurant – it doesn't matter. The point is the food. A wonderful mixed grill, pulled straight from

the fire onto your plate, or a thick filet mignon will set you back more than CUC\$20, but it will be money well spent.

At Marina Hemingway is the terrific **Pizza Nova** (cnr Av Sta & 248), serving pies on the water and the well-stocked Supermercado Universo.

Entertainment

MIRAMAR

Teatro Karl Marx (☎ 203-0801, 209-1991; cnr Av 1 & Calle 10) The very biggest events happen here, such as the closing galas for the jazz and film fests (with Harry Belafonte and Roman Polanski in the house) and rare concerts by *trovador* Carlos Varela. Get tickets for row 20 or closer because the acoustics crumple if you're back under the balcony.

Casa de la Música (☎ 202-6147; Calle 20 No 3308; admission CUC\$5-20; ☎ 10pm Tue-Sat) One of Habana's premier venues, you're good time is almost guaranteed at this casa run by recording company Egrem. Renowned jazz pianists Chuchu Valdés, NG la Banda, Los Van Van, Aldaberto Alvarez y Su Son: all the platinum players gig here. If you can only make it out one night for live music, this is the place.

Havana Club Disco (☎ 202-7712; cnr Av 1 & Calle 86; admission CUC\$10; ☎ 10pm-3am Mon-Sat) This tremendous video disco behind the Hotel Comodoro is probably more trouble than it's worth: no posted prices, lots of *jineteras* and their over-50 benefactors and itty-bitty drinks in plastic cups.

Río Club (☎ 209-3389; Calle A No 314 btwn Avs 3 & 3A; ☎ 10pm) This disco claims to offer *el sonido más duro de la ciudad* (the hardest sound in town). The location is reflected in the scene, which is a good mix of locals and tourists, but pricey for what it is.

MARIANAO

Tropicana Nightclub (☎ 267-1871; Calle 72 No 4504; ☎ show at 10pm) Cuba's most famous nightclub. Since the Tropicana opened in 1939, famous artists such as Benny Moré, Nat King Cole and Maurice Chevalier have appeared here. More than 200 dancers perform during Tropicana's 1950s-style cabaret show 'Paradise Under the Stars,' a spectacle not soon forgotten. The doors open at 8:30pm. Admission including one drink is from CUC\$65 per person, depending on the table. Tropicana bookings can be made through

any hotel tour desk, with hotel transfers included. The Tropicana box office opens 10am to 4pm daily, and although booking in person is no cheaper, you'll be able to choose your own table (important as we've received several complaints about switched tables and botched reservations). When bookings are light, bar seats might be available (CUC\$25), but these can't be reserved in advance. Just turn up at 8:30pm and ask.

Order a bottle of rum and your mixers straight away to avoid fighting for your server's attention during the show. The dress code here requires that men wear long pants and shoes (important to remember if you arrive by tour bus straight from a day of sightseeing). An after-hours club called Arcos de Cristal is on the same premises as the Tropicana, and it has a show that starts after the one at the Tropicana finishes.

Salón Rosado Benny Moré (El Tropical; ☎ 206-1281; cnr Av 41 & 46, Playa; admission 10 pesos-CUC\$10; ☎ 9pm-late) For something completely different, check out the very *caliente* (hot) action at this outdoor venue. This place (aka El Tropical) packs in hot, sexy Cuban youths dancing madly to Los Van Van, Pupi y Su Son or Habana Abierta. It's a fierce scene and female travelers should expect aggressive come-ons. Friday to Sunday is best. Some travelers pay pesos, others Convertibles – more of that Cuban randomness for you.

The Circo Tropoloco (cnr Av Sta & 112; admission CUC\$10) Habana's permanent circus with shows at 7pm Thursday to Sunday plus a weekend matinee.

Estadio Pedro Marrero (cnr Av 41 & Calle 46) You can see soccer matches on weekends at 3pm at this 15,000-seat stadium.

LA LISA

Macamba Habana (☎ 33 05 68/9; cnr Calle 222 & Av 37; admission CUC\$10-20; ☎ 10pm) This residential neighborhood southwest of Cubanacán holds Macamba Habana, one of Habana's biggest venues for live salsa. The outdoor setting is refreshing and the sets long, so you'll get a lot of dancing in. You can also dine at La Giradilla in the same complex. Great place to catch jazz-salsa combos. Hotels and Infotur (p145) sell excursions here, but you're better off getting here yourself (a Convertible taxi should cost around CUC\$8 to CUC\$10).

Shopping

La Casa del Habano (cnr Av 5 & Calle 16; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Smokers and souvenir seekers will like La Casa, arguably Habana's top cigar store. There's a comfy smoking lounge and a decent restaurant here as well.

La Maison (Calle 16 No 701, Miramar) The Cuban fashion fascination is in high gear at this place, with a large boutique selling designer clothing, shoes, handbags, jewelry, cosmetics and souvenirs.

Photo Club (☎ 204-1969; cnr Av 3 & Calle 84, Playa) Develops prints, sells batteries and film.

For CDs head to **Egrem Tienda de Música** (Calle 18 No 103; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat), which has a great selection, or visit the **Casa de la Música** (cnr Av 35 & Calle 20; ☎ 10am-10pm).

Getting There & Away

To get to Playa from Habana, take bus 264 from Desamparados, between Picota and Compostela, near the old city wall southeast of the Estación Central de Ferrocarriles (Central Station). Otherwise try bus 132 or 232 from Dragones and Industria beside the Capitolio. From Vedado to Playa you can catch the P1 from in front of Coppelia on Calle 23 or the P4 along Línea, just before Paseo toward Calle A. For Marianao, take bus 34 from Dragones and Industria or the M-4 camello from Parque Fraternidad (a long, slow ride).

To reach the Marina Hemingway, take bus 9 or 420 from near the tunnel under the Río Almendares in Miramar.

Getting Around

There are two **Havanautos** (Miramar ☎ 203-9104; 3rd fl Sierra Maestra Bldg, cnr Av 1 & Calle 0; Playa ☎ 204-3203; cnr Av Sta & 112).

Cubacar (☎ 204-1707) has an office across the street from Hotel El Viejo y El Mar at the Marina Hemingway, plus at the Chateau Miramar, the Bello Caribe and the Meliá Habana.

Via Rent-a-Car (☎ 24 34 29) has an office opposite the Hotel El Bosque in Kohly district of Miramar.

There are Servi-Cupet gas stations at Av 31, between Calles 18 and 20, in Miramar; on the corner of Calle 72 and Av 41 in Marianao (near the Tropicana); and on the traffic circle at Av 5 and Calle 112 in Cubanacán. Oro Negro is at Av 5 and Calle 120, Cubanacán. All are open 24 hours.

PARQUE LENIN AREA

Parque Lenin, off the Calzada de Bejucal in Arroyo Naranjo, 20km south of central Habana, is the city's largest recreational area. Constructed between 1969 and 1972, this is one of the few developments in Habana from that era. These 670 hectares of green parkland and beautiful old trees surround an artificial lake, the Embalse Paso Sequito, just west of the much larger Embalse Ejército Rebelde.

Although the park itself is attractive enough, the mish-mash of available facilities inside has fallen on hard times since the onset of the *periodo especial*. Taxi drivers will wax nostalgic about when 'Lenin' was an idyllic weekend getaway for scores of pleasure-seeking Habana families, though these days the place retains more of a neglected and surreal air. Fortunately help is on the way. New management is currently in the throes of a major renovation project to bring the park back to its former glory. Expect some of this information to have changed by the time you read it.

Sights

The main things to see are south of the lake, including the **Galería de Arte Amelia Peláez** (admission CUC\$1). Up the hill there's a dramatic white marble **monument to Lenin** (1984) by the Soviet sculptor LE Kerbel, and west along the lake is an overgrown **amphitheater** and an **aquarium** (admission CUC\$2; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed Mon) with freshwater fish and crocodiles. The 1985 bronze **monument to Celia Sánchez** (now deceased), a longtime associate of Fidel Castro who was instrumental in having Parque Lenin built, is rather hidden beyond the aquarium. A **ceramics workshop** is nearby.

Most of these attractions are open 9am to 5pm Tuesday to Sunday, and admission to the park itself is free. You can rent a **rowboat** on the Embalse Paso Sequito from a dock behind the **Rodeo Nacional**. A 9km **narrow-gauge railway** with four stops operates inside the park from 10am to 3pm Wednesday to Sunday.

A visit to Parque Lenin can be combined with a trip to **ExpoCuba**, (☎ 66 42 92; admission CUC\$1; 9am-5pm Wed-Sun) at Calabazar on the Carretera del Rocío in Arroyo Naranjo, 3km south of Las Ruinas restaurant. Opened in 1989, this large permanent exhibition

showcases Cuba's economic and scientific achievements in 25 pavilions based on themes such as sugar, farming, apiculture, animal science, fishing, construction, food, geology, sports and defense. Cubans visiting ExpoCuba flock to the amusement park at the center of the complex, bypassing the rather dry propaganda displays. **Don Cuba** (☎ 57 82 87), a revolving restaurant is atop a tower. The FERIA INTERNACIONAL DE LA HABANA, Cuba's largest trade fair, is held at ExpoCuba the first week of November. Parking is available at Gate E, at the south end of the complex (CUC\$1).

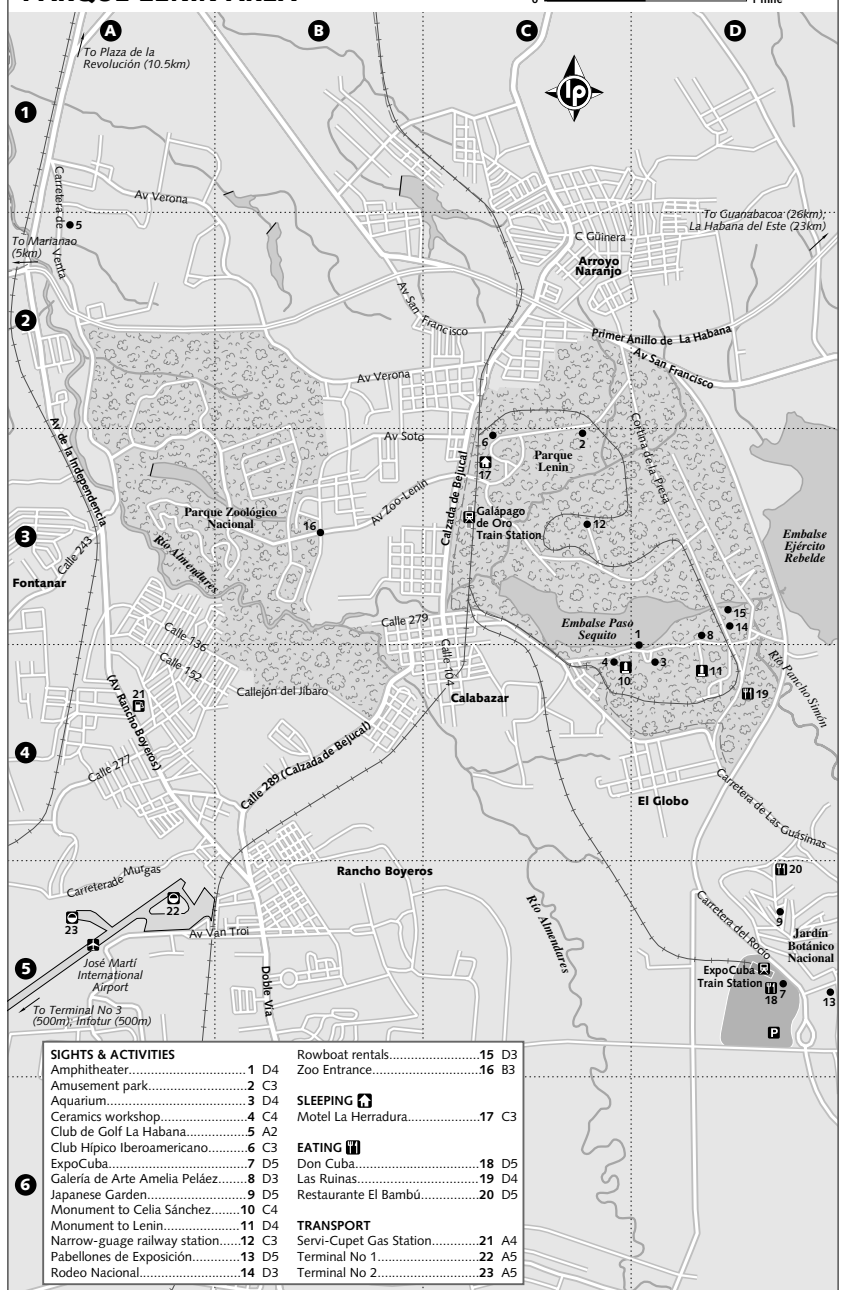
Across the highway from ExpoCuba is the 600-hectare **Jardín Botánico Nacional** (☎ 54 93 65; admission CUC\$1; 8:30am-4:30pm Wed-Sun). The **Pabellones de Exposición** (1987), near the entry gate, is a series of greenhouses with cactuses and tropicals, while 2km beyond is the tranquil **Japanese Garden** (1992). Nearby is the celebrated **Restaurante El Bambú**, where a vegetarian buffet is CUC\$14 (see the boxed text, p128). The tractor train ride around the park departs four times a day and costs CUC\$3, gardens admission included. Parking costs CUC\$2.

The extensive **Parque Zoológico Nacional** (☎ 44 76 13; adult/child CUC\$3/2; 9am-3:30pm Wed-Sun) off Calzada de Bejucal, on Av Zoo-Lenin in Boyeros, is 2km west of the Parque Lenin riding school. Worlds apart from the inner-city zoo at Av 26 near the Viazul terminal in Nuevo Vedado, with its stagnant crocodile ponds and jail cells for cages, this is more of a zoo/safari park where rhinos, hippos and other imported fauna have free reign. A trolley bus tours the grounds all day (included in admission). The caged animals (big cats, primates etc) are more akin to Latin American zoo-style.

Activities

In the northwestern corner of Parque Lenin, behind Motel La Herradura, is the **Club Hípico Iberoamericano** (☎ 44 10 58; 9am-5pm). Horseback riding through the park on a steed rented from the club costs CUC\$12 an hour, but horses rented from boys at the nearby amusement park (currently undergoing major renovations) or at the entrance to Parque Lenin proper (you'll be besieged) costs CUC\$3 per hour, guide included. Keep an eye out for undernourished or maltreated horses.

PARQUE LENIN AREA



The **Club de Golf La Habana** (☎ 45 45 78; Carretera de Venta, Km 8, Reparto Capdevila, Boyeros; ☎ 8am-8pm) lies between Vedado and the airport. Poor signposting makes it hard to find: ask locals for directions to the 'golfito' or 'Dilpo Golf Club.' Originally titled the Rover's Athletic Club, it was established by a group of British diplomats in 1948 and the diplomatic corps is largely the clientele today. There are nine holes with 18 tees to allow 18-hole rounds. Green fees start at CUC\$20 for nine holes and CUC\$30 for 18 holes, with extra for clubs, cart and caddie. In addition, the club has five tennis courts and a bowling alley (open noon to 11pm). Nonmembers can use the club's swimming pool for a small fee.

Sleeping & Eating

Motel La Herradura (☎ 44 30 26; Parque Lenin) The motel has reopened after undergoing renovations. Despite being the nearest accommodation to Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí, it's an obscure motel that many taxi drivers don't even know about and certainly not the best place to bed down on your first night in Cuba. That said, the staff are friendly enough and there's a restaurant here too. If you want to make an early flight it's a possibility – although you'll be relying on taxis for transport. Rooms are campismo-style and rock-bottom budget.

Las Ruinas (☎ 57 82 86; Cortina de la Presa; ☎ 11am-midnight Tue-Sun) On the southeastern side of Parque Lenin this is one of Habana's most celebrated restaurants. It's a striking combination of the ruined walls of an old sugar mill engulfed in modern architecture highlighted by René Portocarrero's stained-glass windows. The antique furnishings enhance the elegant atmosphere. The menu includes lobster plus several Cuban and Italian selections, but some readers thought it overrated (it's definitely not a cheap date – plan on CUC\$30 per person if you choose carefully).

Getting There & Away

Your public transport choices to Parque Lenin are bus or train. The first is more reliable, with bus 88 from Vibora and bus 113 from Marianao running right through the park; otherwise, there's bus 31 to Galápago de Oro and bus 473 to El Globo, just south of the park. There are also supposed to be

trains from Cristina Station in Habana to the Galápago de Oro Train Station on the northwestern side of the park four times a day, but don't count on it.

More reliable is the ExpoCuba train. A three-wagon railcar departs the **Train Station 19 de Noviembre** (☎ 881-4431) on Calle Tulipán in Nuevo Vedado, Wednesday to Sunday for the exhibition at 9:30am (one peso), and returns at 5:30pm. This train passes Boyeros, Parque Lenin and El Rincón.

Getting Around

There's a Servi-Cupet gas station on the corner of Av de la Independencia and Calle 271 in Boyeros, north of the airport. It's accessible only from the northbound lane and is open 24 hours a day.

SANTIAGO DE LAS VEGAS AREA

While not exactly brimming with tourist potential, downbeat and dusty Santiago de las Vegas offers a fleeting glimpse of a Cuba apart from the romantic coffee table photo books of lore. A curious amalgamation of small town versus sleepy city suburb, most visitors, Cuban or otherwise, encounter the settlement's pleasant and congenial airs every December during the devotional crawl to the Santuario de an Lázaro in the nearby village of El Rincón.

Sights & Activities

On a hilltop at **El Cacahual**, 8km south of Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí via Santiago de las Vegas, is the open-air mausoleum of the hero of Cuban independence, General Antonio Maceo, who was killed in the Battle of San Pedro near Bauta on December 7, 1896. An open-air pavilion next to the mausoleum shelters a historical exhibit.

Another feature of this area is the well-kept AIDS sanatorium 'Los Cocos,' which opened in 1986, occupying buildings on both sides of the road midway between Santiago de las Vegas and El Rincón. Cubans found to be HIV-positive were once required to stay here indefinitely, but the norm is now a couple of weeks, after which they're free to leave provided they're considered sexually responsible. In practice many stay because medical and housing conditions here are often better than at home. The scene on December 16, during

the Procession of San Lázaro, with many patients pressed against the fence flirting and conversing on living with HIV with passersby is what the Cuban character is all about, as it's socializing, questioning, joking and educating all in one.

Getting There & Away

To get here, take the M-2 Metro Bus from Parque de la Fraternidad in Habana to Santiago de las Vegas. Bus 476 between Santiago de las Vegas and La Ceiba passes both the AIDS sanatorium and the sanctuary. On December 16, trains run all night from Train Station 19 de Noviembre, on Calle Tulipán in Nuevo Vedado (one peso).

REGLA

pop 42,390

The old town of Regla, just across the harbor from Habana Vieja, is an industrial port town known as a center of Afro-Cuban religions, including the all-male secret society Abakú. Several *babalawos* (Santería priests) reside in Regla, and it's not hard to find one if you're in need of advice (in Spanish). Long before the triumph of the 1959 revolution, Regla was known as the Si-

THE PROCESSION OF SAN LÁZARO

There can be few pilgrimages more powerful or disturbing than the devotional crawl to the Santuario de San Lázaro in Santiago de las Vegas that takes place each December 16 on the outskirts of Habana. Every year up to 50,000 Cubans descend en masse on the venerated shrine of Lazarus – a Christian saint known for his ministrations to lepers and the poor – some on bloodied knees; others dragging themselves prostrate across the asphalt or walking barefoot for kilometers through the night to exorcise evil spirits and pay off debts for miracles granted.

Along the long and winding route offerings of flowers, candles and coins are made to the impoverished figure of San Lázaro, a figure paralleled in Afro-Cuban Santería by the *orisha* (deity) Babalú Ayé, the god of sick ness. By the time the church's bells chime at midnight in an atmosphere heavy with cigar fumes, idolatry and heartfelt petition, the distinction is barely necessary.

erra Chiquita (Little Sierra, after the Sierra Maestra) for its revolutionary traditions. This working-class neighborhood is also notable for a large thermoelectric power plant and shipyard. Regla is almost free of tourist trappings, and makes a nice afternoon out of the city; the skyline views from this side of the harbor offer perspective. There are lots of little peso food items for sale along Martí, a good vegetable market and lots of local street scenes.

Sights & Activities

Beyond a huge ceiba tree on Santuario, in front of you as you get off the ferry, is the **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Regla** (☎ 97 62 88; ☎ 7:30am-6pm) with La Santísima Virgen de Regla on the main altar. This black Madonna is associated with Yemayá, the *orisha* (deity) of the ocean and patron of sailors (always represented in blue). Legend claims this image was carved by St Augustine 'The African' in the 5th century, and that in the year AD 453 a disciple brought the statue to Spain to safeguard it from barbarians. The small vessel in which the image was traveling survived a storm in the Strait of Gibraltar, so the figure was recognized as the patron of sailors. These days, rafters attempting to reach the US also evoke the protection of the Black Virgin.

In the early 17th century a hut was built at Regla to shelter a copy of the image, and when this was destroyed during a hurricane, a new Virgen de Regla was brought from Spain in 1664. In 1714 Nuestra Señora de Regla was proclaimed patron of Bahía de La Habana. A pilgrimage is celebrated here on September 7, when the image is taken out for a **procession** through the streets. **Mass** is said at 8am Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and on Sunday a second Mass is said at 5pm. There is no better (public) place to see the layering and transference between Catholic beliefs and African traditions than in this church. A branch of the Museo Municipal de Regla is next door.

To visit a *babalawo* is not impossible if you've got a bit of time and are willing to do a bit of do-it-yourself hunting around. You'll probably be presented with protective beads and/or prescriptions for treatment. A donation left on the altar in the living room is expected (CUC\$5). One

famous Regla *babalawo* is **Eberardo Marero** (Nico López No 60 btwn Coyola & Camilo Cienfuegos), and others live nearby.

The main outpost of the **Museo Municipal de Regla** (☎ 97 69 89; Martí No 158; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) is a couple of blocks straight up the main street from the ferry. It records the history of Regla and its Afro-Cuban religions, and there's an interesting, small exhibit on Remigio Herrero, first *babalawo* of Regla, as well as a bizarre statue of Napoleon with his nose missing. An **Observatorio Astronómico** was established in the museum building in 1921. Price of admission includes both museum outposts and the Colina Lenin exhibit.

From the museum head straight (south) on Martí past **Parque Guaicanamar**, and turn left on Albuquerque and right on 24 de Febrero, the road to Guanabacoa. About 1.5km from the ferry you'll see a high metal stairway that gives access to **Colina Lenin**. In 1924 Antonio Bosch, the socialist mayor of Regla, created a monument to Lenin's death, one of the first of its kind outside the USSR. Above the monolithic image of Lenin in Regla is an olive tree planted by Bosch sur-

rounded by seven lithe figures; unlike many other Soviet-inspired monuments you'll find in Cuba, this one imbues hope. Maybe it's the fine harbor views from here. A small exhibition on the history of Colina Lenin is in a pavilion on the back side of the hill (it's often closed).

Getting There & Away

Regla is easily accessible on the regular passenger ferry that departs every 10 minutes (10 centavos) from Muelle Luz, San Pedro and Santa Clara, in Habana Vieja. Bicycles are readily accepted via a separate line that boards first. Bus 29 runs to Guanabacoa from Parque Maceo between the ferry terminal and the Museo Municipal de Regla, but the boat is much more fun.

GUANABACOA

pop 106,374

In the 1540s the Spanish conquerors concentrated the few surviving indigenous people at Guanabacoa, 5km east of central Habana. A town was founded here in 1607, and this later became a center of the slave trade. In 1762 the British occupied

URBAN AGRICULTURE

In 1991 with the Soviet Union consigned forever to the garbage can of history, Cuba waved goodbye to over 1.3 million tons of chemical fertilizers. Almost overnight an agricultural sector based on oil-derived pesticides and intensive modern farming techniques slipped into a life-threatening coma.

In a desperate bid to offset countrywide food shortages on a massive scale the Cuban government initiated the so-called Urban Agricultural Program, a pioneering scheme of drastic austerity measures that sponsored new organic farming techniques and outlawed the use of chemical pesticides for good.

In Habana where the problem of food security was particularly acute, the authorities aimed to reduce transport, refrigeration and storage costs by moving agricultural production closer to the city. In a flurry of land reclamation schemes garbage dumps, ornamental gardens, railway sidings and private balconies were hastily requisitioned by community groups and converted into *organipónicos* (urban vegetable gardens).

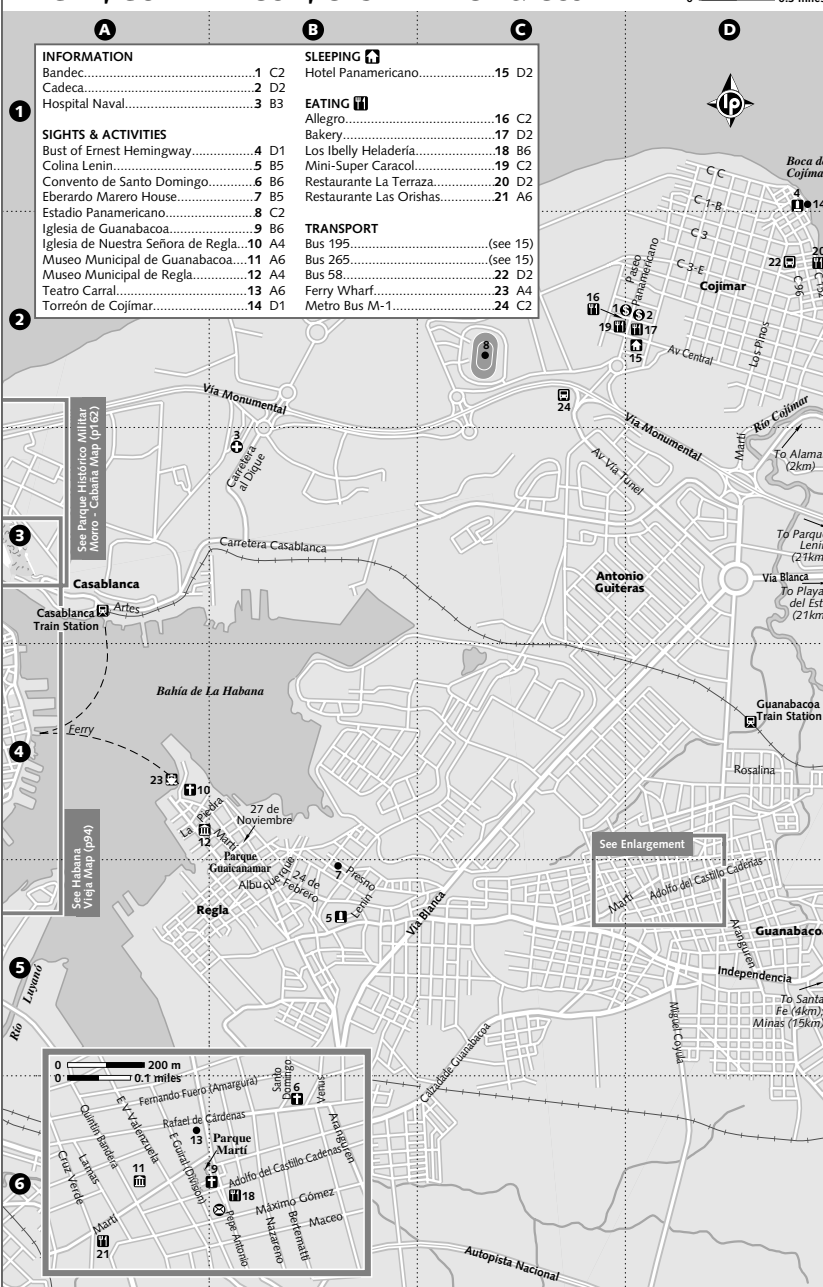
Varying in size from a few square meters to 3 hectares these pioneering vegetable gardens – farmed by a mixture of individuals, families and local community groups – helped to foster the implementation of such eco-friendly practices as nutrient recycling, soil and water management, and land-use planning.

For environmentalists, the scheme was a triumph in green thinking and ecological innovation. As well as providing up to 30% of Cuba's daily food requirements through the provision of fresh, homegrown produce, urban agriculture has also served to empower fragmented communities, renew local solidarity and clear up urban eyesores with vivid splashes of greenery.

Today the program returns an annual yield of 3.7 million tons from a land base of approximately 45,000 hectares. The project has also had a marked social impact creating 320,000 new jobs countrywide.

REGLA, GUANABACOA, CASABLANCA & COJIMAR

0 500 m
0 0.3 miles



Guanabacoa, but not without a fight from its mayor, José Antonio Gómez Bulones, better known as Pepe Antonio, who attained almost legendary status by conducting a guerrilla campaign behind the lines of the victorious British.

Guanabacoa today is a sleepy yet colorful place that feels more like a small town than a sprawling city suburb. There are no hotels here, and access on public transport is not easy, but a visit is worthwhile if tied in with an excursion to nearby Regla (easily accessible by ferry). Both towns retain strong and active Santería traditions.

Information

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (cnr Calle Martí & EV Valenzuela)

Sights

The **Iglesia de Guanabacoa** (cnr Pepe Antonio & Adolfo del Castillo Cadenas), on Parque Martí in the center of town, is also known as the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, and was designed by Lorenzo Camacho and built between 1721 and 1748. The gilded main altar and nine lateral altars are worth a look, and there is a painting of the Assumption of the Virgin is at the back. Notice the Moorish-influenced wooden ceiling. The main doors are usually closed, but you can knock at the **parochial office** (☎ 8am-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) on the back side of the church.

The town's main sight is the freshly renovated **Museo Municipal de Guanabacoa** (☎ 97 91 17; Martí No 108; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), two blocks west of Parque Martí. Founded in 1964, most of the exhibits relate to the history of Cuba during the 18th and 19th centuries. The museum is most famous for its rooms on Afro-Cuban culture, but these are often closed (ask before paying).

Conspicuous for its Moorish arch, the eclectic **Teatro Carral** (☎ 97 92 33; Pepe Antonio No 362), off Parque Martí, is a cinema. From here go north one block on Pepe Antonio to Rafael de Cárdenas, and then head east three blocks to the **Convento de Santo Domingo** (1748). This former Franciscan monastery is the second most important church in Guanabacoa, and its eight altars, wooden ceiling and adjacent cloister are worth seeing, but it's often closed.

Eating

Restaurante Las Orishas (cnr Martí & Lamas; ☎ 10am-midnight) There's a very pleasant garden bar in a courtyard with colorful Afro-Cuban sculptures. The menu is reasonable and varied, with everything from a CUC\$1 microwave cheese pizza to a CUC\$20-plus lobster.

Los Ibelly Heladería (Adolfo del Castillo Cárdenas No 5a; ☎ 10am-10pm) As close as Guanabacoa gets to the Coppelia with quick-serve ice cream.

Getting There & Away

Bus 3 to Guanabacoa leaves from Máximo Gómez and Aponte near the Hotel Isla de Cuba in Centro Habana. Bus 5 begins its run to Guanabacoa from the park across the street from Habana's main bus station. You can also get there on buses 195 and 295 from Vedado. Bus 29 arrives from Regla. Be aware that buses 5 and 29 stop right in front of the church in the center of Guanabacoa, while buses 3, 195 and 295 pass a few blocks away (ask when to get off for Parque Martí). You can walk downhill from Guanabacoa to Regla, where the Habana ferry docks, in about 45 minutes, passing Colina Lenin on the way.

SAN FRANCISCO DE PAULA

In 1939 US novelist Ernest Hemingway rented a villa called Finca la Vigía on a hill at San Francisco de Paula, 15km southeast of central Habana. A year later he bought the house (1888) and property and lived there continuously until 1960, when he moved back to the US. Each morning Hemingway would rise at dawn and spend six hours standing in oversized moccasins before a typewriter and full-length mirror, writing. In the evening he'd receive personal friends over cocktails.

The villa's interior has remained unchanged since the day Hemingway left (there are lots of stuffed trophies), and the wooded estate is now the **Museo Hemingway** (Map p90; ☎ 91 08 09; unguided/guided CUC\$3/4, plus camera/video CUC\$5/25; ☎ 9am-4:30pm, closed Tue). Hemingway left his house and its contents to the 'Cuban people.' Hemingway's house has recently been the stimulus for a rare show of US-Cuban cooperation. In 2002 the Cubans agreed to a US-funded project to help restore thousands of Heming-

way artifacts from Finca La Vigía and in May 2006 11,000 documents relating to Hemingway's work were sent to the JFK Presidential library in America for digitalization. To prevent the pilfering of objects, visitors are not allowed inside the house, but there are enough open doors and windows to allow a proper glimpse into Papa's universe. There are books everywhere (including beside the toilet), a large Victrola and record collection and an astounding number of knickknacks. Don't come when it's raining as the house itself will be closed. A stroll through the garden is worthwhile to see the surprisingly sentimental dog cemetery, Hemingway's fishing boat *El Pilar* and the pool where actress Ava Gardner once swam naked. You can chill out on a chaise lounge below whispering palms and bamboo here.

At the time of writing most of the house was closed for major renovations. Check the current situation in your Habana hotel or tourist agency before setting out.

To reach San Francisco de Paula, take Metro Bus M-7 (Cotorro) from Industria, between Dragones and Av Simón Bolívar, on Parque de la Fraternidad, in Centro Habana. You'll go eight stops to San Miguel del Padrón.

SANTA MARÍA DEL ROSARIO

☎ 6820

Santa María del Rosario, 19km southeast of central Habana, is an old colonial town founded in 1732. Unlike most other towns from that period it has not become engulfed in modern suburbs, but stands alone in the countryside. The charms of this area were recognized by one of Cuba's greatest living painters, Manuel Mendive, who selected it for his personal residence. You can also see the countryside of this area in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's metaphorical critique of slavery in his movie *La Última Cena*.

The **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Rosario** (☎ 5:30-7:30pm) also called the Catedral de los Campos de Cuba, on Santa María del Rosario's old town square, was built in 1720 by the Conde de Casa Bayona near the Quiebra Hacha Sugar Mill, of which nothing remains today. Inside are a gilded mahogany altar and a painting by Veronese.

On a rear wall of the **Casa de la Cultura**, opposite the church, is a great mural by

Manuel Mendive depicting the legends of this region.

From Habana take the Metro Bus M-7 to Cotorro and then bus 97, which runs from Guanabacoa to town.

PARQUE HISTÓRICO MILITAR MORRO-CABAÑA

The sweeping views of Habana from the other side of the bay are lovely and a trip to the two old forts of the **Parque Histórico Militar Morro-Cabaña** is worthwhile. It gets very hot around midday with the sun pounding down; beat the heat with a drink at one of the shoreline bars or restaurants or come at sunset – sensational. All the Habana travel agencies offer tours here; the **cañonazo ceremony** (p115) is especially popular (without/with dinner CUC\$15/25).

The **Castillo de los Tres Santos Reyes Magos del Morro** (El Morro; per person incl museum entrance CUC\$4) was erected between 1589 and 1630 on an abrupt limestone headland to protect the entrance to the harbor. In 1762 the British captured El Morro by attacking from the landward side and digging a tunnel under the walls. The castle's gallant Spanish commander, Don Luis de Velasco, was killed in the battle, and the British buried him with full military honors. In 1845 a lighthouse was added to the castle, the first in Cuba. Since 1986 the castle has hosted a **maritime museum** (☎ 863-7941; guide CUC\$1, plus camera CUC\$2; ☎ 8am-8pm). To climb to the top of the lighthouse is an additional CUC\$2.

The **Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña** (La Cabaña; ☎ 862-0617; admission day CUC\$4, night CUC\$6, guide CUC\$1; ☎ 8am-11pm) was built between 1763 and 1774 to deny the long ridge overlooking Habana to attackers. It's one of the largest colonial fortresses in the Americas, replete with grassy moats, ancient chapel, cobblestone streets and shops inside. It cost so much to build, Carlos III of Spain supposedly tried to spy it through a telescope, convinced it must be visible from Madrid. During the 19th century, Cuban patriots faced firing squads in the **Foso de los Laureles** outside La Cabaña's southeastern wall. Dictators Machado and Batista used the fortress as a military prison, and immediately after the revolution, Che Guevara set up his headquarters there. Be sure to visit the creative Habana skyline **mirador** (lookout) on the other side of the **Museo de Comandancia**



del Che here. Later it served as a military academy.

Visitors are welcome to see the collection of armaments at the **Museo Fortificaciones y Armas**. Nightly at 9pm a cannon is fired on the harbor side of La Cabaña by a squad attired in 19th-century uniforms, a hold-over from Spanish times when such a shot signaled that the city gates were closing. The **cañonazo** begins at 8:30pm and is included in the regular admission price (as is the concert following by Moncada, a locally famous geriatric rock band). A smaller cannon, with equally overdressed young men, is shot off daily at 3pm.

Surprisingly, almost no tourists visit the more interesting La Cabaña, while El Morro is usually jammed (tour buses unload their masses at El Morro but never have time for La Cabaña). Around mid-morning it's especially chaotic at El Morro, as the tour buses from Varadero stop there on their way to Habana, so you'll need to plan accordingly. The annual Feria Internacional del Libro is held at El Morro each January.

Eating

Paladar Doña Carmela (☎ 863-6048; Calle B No 10; ☎ evenings only) A private eating option that offers quality chicken and pork in a very pleasant al fresco setting (when it's open). Makes a good dinner before or after the **cañonazo**, but check ahead as opening times are sporadic.

Parts of the fortresses have been converted into good restaurants and atmospheric bars. The **Restaurante Los Doce Apóstoles** (☎ 863-8295; ☎ noon-11pm) below El Morro, so named for the battery of 12 cannons atop its ramparts, serves *comida criolla*. It's a better-than-average government-run kitchen, and the prices are fair. **Bar El Polvorín** (☎ 860-9990; ☎ 10am-4am) just beyond Los Doce Apóstoles, offers drinks and light snacks on a patio overlooking the bay. There's zero shade, but it's perfect for those famous Habana sunsets.

Back below La Cabaña, just beyond the Dársena de los Franceses, is another battery of huge 18th-century cannons. The upscale but approachable **Restaurante La Divina Pastora** (☎ 860-8341; ☎ noon-11pm) behind the

guns, offers well-prepared seafood, including lobster and fish. You can also just sit and soak in the views with an icy Cristal and some crisp *tostones*.

Getting There & Away

Cyclists can get to the fortresses from Habana with the specially designed Ciclo-Bus leaving from Dragones and Águila on Parque El Curita (Map p100). This seatless bus is accessible via small ramps that lead to the doors. Cyclists are obliged to use it to get to La Habana del Este as riding a bicycle through the tunnel is prohibited. If you don't have a bicycle, you can walk to the head of the line and get on the first bus (ask the person selling bus tickets). Get off at the first stop after the tunnel; it's only a 10-minute walk back to either fortress. You can also get there on the pink M-1 Metro Bus, (get off at the first stop after the tunnel), but make sure you're near an exit as very few other people get out there. Otherwise, a metered tourist taxi from Habana Vieja should cost around CUC\$3.

An interesting way to return to Habana is via the Casablanca ferry. From the entrance to La Cabaña, go down into the moat and follow it around to a gate just below the huge Christ statue.

Parking costs CUC\$1 at the fortresses.

CASABLANCA

Casablanca, just across the harbor from Habana Vieja, is best known for its towering white marble **Estatua de Cristo**, created in 1958 by J Madera. As you disembark the harbor ferry, keep going straight up the stairway in front of you. Follow the road on the left to the impressive, but discordant, statue – an easy 10-minute walk. There's a splendid view of Habana from the statue (a popular nighttime hang-out spot), and a 24-hour snack bar at its base. You can reach the fortress of La Cabaña from this side via a red gate at the switchback in the road on your way up to the statue. Behind the statue is the **Observatorio Nacional** (closed to tourists).

The **Hospital Naval** (☎ 62 68 25), off the Vía Monumental in La Habana del Este, northeast of Casablanca, has a recompression chamber accessible 24 hours a day.

Passenger ferries to Casablanca depart Muelle Luz, San Pedro and Santa Clara, in

Habana Vieja, about every 15 minutes (10 centavos). Bicycles are welcome.

The **Casablanca train station** (☎ 862-4888), next to the ferry wharf, is the western terminus of the only electric railway in Cuba. In 1917 the Hershey Chocolate Company of the US state of Pennsylvania built this line to Matanzas, and trains still depart for Matanzas five times a day (currently at 4:46am, 8:35am, 12:48pm, 4:38pm and 8:46pm). The 8:35am service is an 'express.' You'll travel via Guanabo (CUC\$0.80, 25km), Hershey (CUC\$1.45, 46km), Jibacoa (CUC\$1.65, 54km), and Canasí (CUC\$1.95, 65km) to Matanzas (CUC\$2.80, 90km). The train usually leaves Casablanca on time but often arrives an hour late. No one on a tight schedule should use this train. Apparently bicycles aren't allowed on this train, but try anyway. It's a scenic four- to five-hour trip, and tickets are easily obtainable at the station (except on weekends and holidays when it could be crowded).

COJÍMAR AREA

Situated ten kilometers east of Habana is the little port town of Cojímar, famous for harboring Ernest Hemingway's fishing boat *El Pilar* in the 1940s and '50s. This picturesque, if slightly run-down, harbor community served as the prototype for the fishing village in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, which won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. Cojímar native and fishing sage Gregorio Fuentes (recently deceased) inspired Hemingway's 'Old Man.' It was founded in 17th century at the mouth of the Río Cojímar; in 1762 an invading British army landed here; and in 1994, thousands of 'rafters' split from the sheltered but rocky bay, lured to Florida by US radio broadcasts and promises of political asylum.

If you're not a Hemingway devotee or particularly enamored of nondescript seaside villages, there's little reason to visit here.

Information

Bandec (☎ 8:30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8:30-11am Sat), which is just down the Paseo Panamericano, changes traveler's checks and gives cash advances. For Cuban pesos there's **Cadeca** (on Paseo Panamericano & 5D), just down the side street, across the avenue from Bandec.

Sights

The huge 55,000-seat **Estadio Panamericano**, on the Vía Monumental between Habana and Cojimar, was built for the 1991 Pan-American Games and is already looking suitably dilapidated. There are also tennis courts, Olympic-sized swimming pools and other sporting facilities nearby.

Overlooking the harbor is the **Torreón de Cojimar**, an old Spanish fort (1649) presently occupied by the Cuban coast guard. Next to this tower and framed by a neoclassical archway is a gilded **bust of Ernest Hemingway** erected by the residents of Cojimar in 1962.

Ernest Hemingway's old captain, Gregorio Fuentes, lived in the green-and-white house at Calle 98 No 209, at the corner of 3D, five blocks up the hill from Restaurante La Terraza.

East across the river from Cojimar is Alamar, a large housing estate of prefabricated apartment blocks built by *micro brigadas* (small armies of workers responsible for building much of the post-revolutionary housing) beginning in 1971. Eye-catching architectural form trails way behind function in Cuban public housing, but it beats living on the streets.

Sleeping

Hotel Panamericano (Av Central; ☎ 95 10 00/10; s/d incl breakfast low season CUC\$45/59, high season CUC\$54/71; P ♿ ♿) At the entrance to Cojimar, 2km from the Hemingway bust, this four-story hotel was built in 1991 (though you could be forgiven for thinking it was 1961) to house athletes attending the 11th Pan-American Games. Inconveniently-located and a little rough around the edges, the establishment was housing Misión Milagros patients as of early 2006. Call ahead to check the status.

Eating

Restaurante La Terraza (☎ 93 92 32; Calle 152 No 161; ☎ noon-11pm) Specializes in seafood such as stuffed squid (CUC\$7) and paella (CUC\$7 to CUC\$15). The terrace dining room overlooking the bay is pleasant. More atmospheric, however, is the old bar out front (open 10:30am to 11pm) where a mojito is just CUC\$1.75. Check out the classic wooden refrigerators and don't miss the B&W photos of Hemingway in the terrace dining room.

Just down from the Hotel Panamericano is a **bakery** (☎ 8am-8pm). Across the Paseo Panamericano is a grocery store, the **Mini-Super Caracol** (☎ 9am-8pm) and a clean and reasonably-priced Italian restaurant **Allegro** (☎ noon-11pm) with lasagna, risotto, spaghetti and pizza all for CUC\$4.

Getting There & Away

Bus 58 from Av de la Independencia and Bruzón, near Habana's main bus station, reaches Cojimar. In Centro Habana, get this bus at Paseo de Martí No 59, near the Malecón. You can catch it back to Habana from Calle 92 in Cojimar, though it's sometimes full and won't stop.

Alternatively, catch the Metro Bus M-1 (Alamar) at the corner of Calles G and 27 in Vedado, or at Paseo de Martí No 563 opposite the Capitolio in Centro Habana, and get out at the third stop after the tunnel. Cross the highway to the Hotel Panamericano, from which it's around 2km downhill through the village to the Hemingway bust. Buses 195 and 265 from Habana also service the Hotel Panamericano.

PLAYAS DEL ESTE

Habana's pine-fringed Riviera, Playas del Este, begins at Bacuranao, 18km east of central Habana, and continues to the east through Tarárá, El Mégano, Santa María del Mar and Boca Ciega to the town of Guanabo, 27km from the capital. This is where all of Habana comes to lounge on soft white sands and bathe in aquamarine waters. About a dozen large resorts are scattered along this 9km stretch of beach, with the largest concentration at Santa María del Mar (Santa María). For a more affordable and local experience here, you can rent a private room in Guanabo (where most Cubans stay) or a little beach house in Boca Ciega. The latter is great for families, as are the spacious houses at Villa Marina Tarárá.

The hotel area of Santa María is now heavily patrolled by uniformed security guards to keep prostitution in check, and the prostitutes withdrawn to the western end of El Mégano and Guanabo. If you come to Santa María with Cuban friends, expect the police to ask for their identification. If everything isn't in order, it's trouble. The heavy security presence makes

this area safe and hassle-free, but it also eliminates much of the local color, and at times Santa María can be like a graveyard. You'll find Cuban families on the beach at Guanabo, Cuban holidaymakers at Boca Ciega, foreign tourists and their friends at Santa María, and men and women in search of each other at the western end of El Mégano. A very pretty part of Santa María is accessible from the parking area on Calle 13.

Cheap tour packages to Santa María are readily available in Canada and Europe, and the resorts provide a base from which you can visit Habana while enjoying a relaxing seaside holiday. Alternatively, these beaches provide an easy and effortless escape from Habana should you need feel the need for it. Access is simple: the Vía Blanca runs right along the back side of the seaside strip, and there are buses between Habana and Guanabo. However, those interested mostly in museums and historical sites would do better to stay in Habana itself.

Approximately 13,500 radiation-affected children and 2500 adults from Ukraine have received medical treatment at a sanatorium at Tarárá since February 1989.

Information

MEDICAL SERVICES

Clinica Internacional Habana del Este (☎ 204-9385; Av de las Terrazas, Santa María) West of Calle 9. Open 24 hours and doctors can make hotel visits. There's also a well-stocked pharmacy on-site.

Farmacia (cnr Av 5 & Calle 466)

MONEY

Banco Popular de Ahorro (☎ 96 22 69; Av 5 No 47810 btwn Calles 478 & 480, Guanabo; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri) Changes traveler's checks.

Cadeca Guanabo (Av 5 No 47614 btwn 476 & 478; ☎ 8am-6pm); Santa María (Edificio Los Corales, Av de las Terrazas btwn Calles 10 & 11)

POST

Post office Guanabo (Av 5 btwn Calles 490 & 492; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat); Santa María (Edificio Los Corales, Av de las Terrazas btwn Calles 10 & 11; ☎ 7:30am-6:30pm)

TELEPHONE

Eteca (Edificio Los Corales, Av de las Terrazas btwn Calles 10 & 11)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Infotur Guanabo (☎ 96 68 68; Av 5 btwn Calles 468 & 470); Santa María (☎ 96 11 11; Edificio Los Corales, Av Las Terrazas btwn Calles 10 & 11)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Cubatur and Havanatur both have desks at Hotel Tropicoco, between Avs del Sur and de las Terrazas in Santa María. Their main business is booking bus tours, though they might be willing to help with hotel reservations in other cities.

Activities

Yacht charters, deep-sea fishing and scuba diving are offered by **Cubanacán Náutica Tarará** (☎ 96 15 08/9; VHF channels 16 & 77; cnr Av 8 & Calle 17, Tarará), 22km east of Habana. Ask about this at your hotel tour desk.

There are a number of **Club Nautica** points spaced along the beaches aside from **Club Megano** at the westernmost end of the Playas. The most central is outside Club Atlántico in the middle of Playa Santa María del Mar. Here you can rent pedal boats (CUC\$6 per hour; four to six people), banana boats (CUC\$5 for five minutes; maximum five people), one- and two-person kayaks (CUC\$2/4 per hour), snorkel gear (CUC\$4) and catamarans (CUC\$12 per hour; maximum four people plus lifeguard). A paddle around the coast exploring the mangrove-choked canals is a pleasure.

Beach toys such as sailboards, water bikes and badminton gear may also be available; ask. Many people rent similar equipment all along the beach to Guanabo, but check any water vessels and gear carefully as we've received complaints about faulty equipment. Consider leaving a deposit instead of pre-paying in full, should anything go awry.

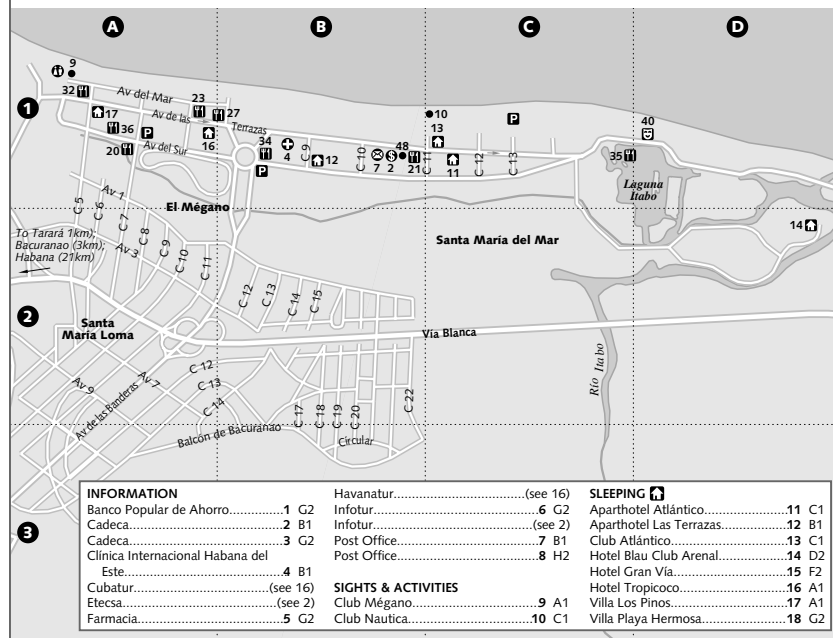
Sleeping

GUANABO

Hotel Gran Vía (Islazul; ☎ 96 22 71; cnr Av 5 & Calle 462; s/d CUC\$19/22; P ♿ ♿) A good budget choice, but because there are only 10 rooms, it's quite difficult to get in. Not all are the same, so if you can look at a few, go for it. The hotel restaurant has a dirt-cheap menu, and a pleasant open-terrace bar is next to the hotel.

Villa Playa Hermosa (Islazul; ☎ 96 27 74; Av 5D btwn Calles 472 & 474; s/d low season CUC\$18/25, high season CUC\$20/29; P ♿ ♿) This villa has 47

PLAYAS DEL ESTE



rooms in small single-story bungalows with shared bath and TV. It's a popular spot with vacationing Cubans, so expect music, dancing and drinking to all hours; the beach is nearby.

PLAYA SANTA MARÍA DEL MAR

Some of the places listed here offer 'all-inclusive' rates that include meals, drinks, accommodation, water toys and (sometimes) bicycles.

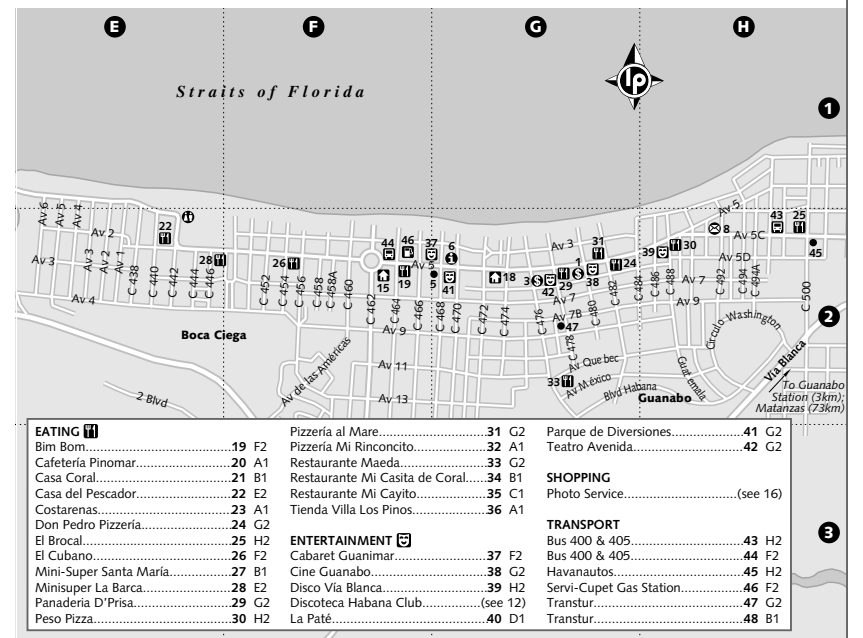
Aparthotel Atlántico (Islazul; ☎ 97 14 94; Av de las Terrazas btwn Calles 11 & 12; 1/2/3-bedroom apt low season CUC\$36/42/60, high season CUC\$42/60/80; (P) (B) (S)) This hotel is just across the street from Club Atlántico. Families make up most of the clientele here. There are 60 apartments with cooking facilities in this four-story development. The two-bedroom units sleep four people and the three-bedrooms accommodate six, so it's great for a group. Ask specifically if your unit will have a fridge, as not all of them do. This is a decent-value choice that is just 100m from the beach.

Aparthotel Las Terrazas (Islazul; ☎ 97 13 44; Av del Sur btwn Calles 9 & 10; 1/2/3-bedroom apt low season

CUC\$36/54/63, high season CUC\$50/75/88; (P) (B) (S)) A bit more upscale than Aparthotel Atlántico, the 154 apartments here have cooking facilities, fridges and TVs. The split-level pool is kind of cool and it's only 100m from the beach. The disco, apart from the hotel, is a popular night spot.

Hotel Tropicoco (Cubanacán; ☎ 97 13 71; btwn Av del Sur & Av de las Terrazas; s/d all-inclusive low season CUC\$45/75, high season CUC\$60/80; (S)) Picked up by Cubanacán from the now-defunct Horizontes chain, there's still a bit of work to be done to knock this big blue monster into shape. The food pretty much stinks, the pool is indoors and the disco has shut. The main benefit is the price: cheap, and the location: you could hit a (big) home-run onto the beach from here.

Hotel Blau Club Arenal (☎ 97 15 20; s/d all-inclusive low season CUC\$70/100, high season CUC\$95/150; (P) (B) (S)) Playas del Este's most stylish option, this modern hotel is on the Laguna Itabo, between Boca Ciega and Santa María del Mar. It has 166 rooms set around a translucent pool. Ground-floor rooms have patios but suites are much larger and cost



about 20% more. The beach is just 150m away via a wooden footbridge suspended over the lagoon (which you can explore by rowboat). If you want a peaceful setting that feels pleasantly secluded, this is your bag.

Club Atlántico (Gran Caribe; ☎ 97 10 85; fax 96 15 32; cnr Av de las Terrazas & Calle 11; s/d all-inclusive CUC\$105/150; (P) (B) (S)) Right on the beach, the Atlántico – after the Blau – comes a close second in Playas del Este's high-quality bracket. The 92 rooms are well equipped with fridge, satellite TV and little balconies. There are tennis courts, a swimming pool and cabaret. This stretch of beach also has a Club Náutica point renting boats, etc right next to the hotel.

PLAYA EL MÉGANO

Villa Los Pinos (Gran Caribe; ☎ 97 13 61; fax 97 15 24; Av de las Terrazas No 21 btwn Calles 5 & 7; 2-bedroom house low/high season CUC\$120/160) A terrific option if you're after private accommodation with style. The collection of houses here have kitchens, TVs and a personal feel (these were holiday getaways before

the Cuban Revolution); the majority also have swimming pools, making them a great option for families when price isn't important. Three- (CUC\$170/210) and four-bedroom (CUC\$220/250) houses are also available.

PLAYA TARARÁ

Villa Marina Tarará (Cubanacán; ☎ 97-1616/17; 1-/2-bedroom houses low season CUC\$35/60, high season CUC\$40/65; (S)) Reached through the Campamento de Pioneros José Martí off the Vía Blanca, 22km east of Habana. The entrance is poorly marked, so be alert. You have to show your passport and receive a pass before you can enter. This is truly a gated community and the well-maintained quiet streets are almost eerie in their order. They have houses with up to seven bedrooms, and the beach is small but nice here so it makes a good family or group getaway. The cheapest houses are far from the beach. Scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, and yachting are readily available at the marina, and there's a disco, swimming pool and gym.

CASAS PARTICULARES – GUANABO

Casa Olivia – Amada V Lois Correa (☎ 96 28 19; Calle 468 No 714 btwn Avs 7 & 9; r CUC\$40; 🍳 🍷) Breakfast, nice house, huge salon.

Elena & Aimeé González (no phone; Calle 472 No 7B11 btwn Avs 7B & 9; r CUC\$25-30; 🍳) Leafy patio here.

Isabel Roman Alonzo (☎ 96 49 26; Calle 470 No 7B07 btwn Calles 7B & 9; r CUC\$30; 🍳) Private with separate entry, kitchenette, sitting area and TV.

La Gallega & Teresa (☎ 96 68 60; Calle 472 No 7B07A btwn Calle 7B & 9; apt CUC\$25-30; 🍳) Three nice independent apartments with kitchen.

Nancy & Tomás (☎ 96 41 57; Calle 444 No 701 btwn Avs 7 & 7A; r CUC\$35, entire house CUC\$50; 🍳) Two-bedroom house; cooking; big porch.

Neyda & Mayito (☎ 96 58 62; Calle 7B No 47007 btwn Calles 470 & 472; r CUC\$25-30; 🍳) Two rooms with shared bath, living room, and kitchen.

Pablo M Durán Jubiel & Rosario Redonda (☎ 96 52 81; Calle 476 No 905 btwn Avs 9 & 9B; r CUC\$25-30; 🍳) Little house with kitchen and patio, also at Nos 906 and 9B01 nearby.

Rolando del Rey (☎ 96 36 16; Calle 470A No 9B09 btwn Calles 9B & 11; r CUC\$30; 🍳) About 500m from the beach.

Teresa Carmona (☎ 96 30 69; Calle 476 No 703 btwn Avs 7A & 7B; r CUC\$30; 🍳) Upstairs.

Sonnica Mujica Amargós (☎ 96 48 50; Calle 476 No 706 btwn Avs 7A & 7B; r CUC\$25-30; 🍳) Can cook here, also at Nos 7B04 and 7B10 nearby.

PLAYA BACURANAO

Villa Bacuranao (Islazul; ☎ 65 76 45; s/d cabañas low season CUC\$33/40, high season CUC\$38/44) On the Via Blanca, 18km east of Habana, this is the closest beach resort to Habana. There's a long sandy beach between the resort and mouth of the Río Bacuranao, across which is the old Torreón de Bacuranao (inside the compound of the Military Academy and inaccessible). The beach here isn't as nice as its more easterly counterparts, but the price is nice.

Eating**GUANABO**

El Brocal (☎ 96 28 92; cnr Av 5 & Calle 500; 🍷 noon-11pm) Want a nice surprise? Then check out this place, which serves up tacos (CUC\$1.50 to CUC\$3), quesadillas and a big combo of shrimp cocktail, fish, rice, salad and dessert (CUC\$7.50) in a little ranch house. There are porch tables here.

Restaurante Maeda (Av Quebec; 🍷 noon-midnight) Near Calle 476. Guanabo's paladar scene is going strong with this restaurant hidden away on the hill.

Pizza for CUC\$1.50 and up per slice is available at **Pizzería al Mare** (cnr Av 5 & Calle 482; 🍷 24hr), although the peso stuff served out of the charcoal-stained shack. **Peso pizza** (cnr 5ta Av & Calle 488), a few blocks to the east is just as good. Spend a little more and you'll be treated to real wood-brick oven slices at

Don Pedro Pizzería (Calle 482 No 503 btwn Avs 5 & 5D; 🍷 11am-11pm).

For ice cream, head to **Bim Bom** (cnr Av 5 & Calle 464; 🍷 11am-1am). **Panadería D'Prisa** (Av 5 No 47802; 🍷 24hr) is the place for pastries and light snacks.

Just when you thought you'd had enough pizza, here's **Casa Coral** (Av 5 btwn Calles 10 & 11): clean, modern, cheap – and close to the beach!

PLAYA BOCA CIEGA

El Cubano (Av 5 btwn Calles 456 & 458; 🍷 11am-midnight) A spick and span place with a full wine-rack (French and Californian), checkered tablecloths and a good version of chicken Cordon Bleu.

Casa del Pescador (cnr Av 5 & Calle 442; 🍷 noon-10:45pm) A good medium-priced seafood restaurant for those who like to dine in style.

PLAYA SANTA MARÍA DEL MAR

Restaurante Mi Cayito (☎ 97 13 39; 🍷 10am-6pm) On a tiny island in the Laguna Itabo, this serves lobster, shrimp and grilled fish in an open-air locale. Nice ambience and cheap pork fillets. There's a live show here every Saturday and Sunday at 3pm, which you can enjoy for the price of a drink.

Restaurante Mi Casita de Coral (cnr Av del Sur & Calle 8; 🍷 10am-11pm) A good seafood restaurant with reasonable prices; more upscale than most here.

Costareñas (Av de las Terrazas; 🍷 10am-midnight) Conveniently situated across from Hotel Tropicoco, this is another fine choice. Costareñas specializes in seafood dishes like paella and a mixed grill with lobster, shrimp and fish. The upstairs terrace is a good place to catch a beer and breeze. Fishermen sell their catch nearby for CUC\$1 per pound; terrific if you've got cooking facilities.

Among the many small grocery stores here are **Minisuper La Barca** (cnr Av 5 & Calle 446; 🍷 9:15am-6:45pm Mon-Sat; 9:15am-2:45pm Sun); **Mini-Super Santa María** (cnr Av de las Terrazas & Calle 7; 🍷 9am-6:45pm), located opposite Hotel Tropicoco; and **Tienda Villa Los Pinos** (Av del Sur btwn 5 & 7; 🍷 9am-6:45pm).

PLAYA EL MÉGANO

Cafetería Pinomar (cnr Av del Sur & Calle 7; 🍷 24hr) This is the least expensive place to eat in this part of Playas del Este. Hamburgers, chicken, hot dogs and beer are served on its outdoor terrace and inside.

Pizzería Mi Rinconcito (cnr Av de las Terrazas & Calle 4; 🍷 noon-9:45pm) Near Villa Los Pinos, it has pizza (CUC\$2 to CUC\$3), cannelloni, lasagna, salads and spaghetti (CUC\$2 to CUC\$3.50). A Dutch traveler said this was the best pizza she had in Cuba (thin crust and lots of fresh toppings).

THE PHOTO THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND T-SHIRTS

Immortalized in a 1960 photograph taken at a funeral service for the victims of *La Coubre*, a French freighter that had been blown up in Habana harbor (reputedly by the CIA), Alberto Korda's timeless image of Che Guevara – expression defiant and eyes gazing wistfully into the future – needs little introduction. By turns it has been touted as the most famous photograph in the world and a defining symbol of the 20th century.

But, classic as it may be, Korda's extraordinary portrait of the dashing *guerrillero* inspired little interest at the time. More valuable to the international newspapers of the day were shots of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir that the photographer had captured on the same Kodak Plus-X reel. In fact, it wasn't until after Che's death more than seven years later that Italian book publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli – having procured a cropped version of the print from a third party (some claim from Sartre himself) – re-worked the image into poster format in order to publicize the Italian release of Che's Bolivian diaries.

In the years that followed a high contrast bust print of the photo made by Irish artist John Fitzpatrick in 1968 was hijacked by everyone from Andy Warhol to rock band *Rage Against the Machine*. It has been decorating the walls of innumerable student bedrooms ever since.

In an ironic twist to the story, Korda, a lifelong socialist and Che supporter, consistently refused to bank a cent for his photographic efforts, although he did once successfully sue Smirnoff vodka for using the image illicitly in an advertisement. Donating his US\$50,000 settlement to the Cuban healthcare system he commented rather nobly, 'if Che were alive, he would have done the same.'

Entertainment**GUANABO**

Disco Via Blanca (cnr Av 5 & Calle 486; males/couples CUC\$1/3; 🍷 9pm-2:30am) Below Hotel Via Blanca, this disco bar is best on weekends and all summer.

Cabaret Guanimar (☎ 96 29 47; cnr Av 5 & Calle 468; per couple CUC\$10; 🍷 9pm-3am Tue-Sat) An outdoor club with a show at 11pm; if you want to be in the front rows, it's CUC\$16 for a couple.

A children's park and playground, the **Parque de Diversiones** (Av 5 btwn Calles 468 & 470) will get the kids laughing, as will the **children's matinees** (🍷 3pm Sat & Sun) at **Teatro Avenida** (☎ 96 29 44; Av 5 No 47612 btwn Calles 476 & 478).

For a movie try **Cine Guanabo** (☎ 96 24 40; Calle 480; 🍷 films at 5:30pm except Wed) off Av 5.

PLAYA SANTA MARÍA DEL MAR

Discoteca Habana Club (☎ 97 13 44; Av de las Terrazas btwn Calles 9 & 10; admission CUC\$5; 🍷 10pm-3am) Located at the Aparthotel Las Terrazas this club attracts a good mix of both locals and tourists.

Playas del Este's gay scene revolves around a beach bar called **La Paté** (Calle 1ra), near Restaurante Mi Cayito, at the east end of Santa María del Mar. You might also check all the way west on Playa El Mégano for cruising opportunities.

Shopping

Photo Service (Hotel Tropicoco btwn Avs del Sur & de las Terrazas) This place will satisfy most of your film and camera needs.

Getting There & Away

BUS & TAXI

Private blue buses (five pesos) from Gloria and Agramonte, near Habana's Estación Central de Ferrocarriles (Central Station), will bring you to Guanabo, though they don't pass through Santa María del Mar.

Bus 400 to Guanabo leaves every hour or so from Taya Piedra, a park two blocks east of Cristina Station in Habana. Going the other way, it stops all along Av 5, but it's best to catch it as far east as possible. Bus 405 runs between Guanabacoa and Guanabo.

A tourist taxi from Playas del Este to Habana will cost around CUC\$20.

TRAIN

One of the best ways to get to Guanabo is on the Hershey Train which leaves five times a day from either Casablanca train station in Habana or from Matanzas. The train will drop you at Guanabo station (lit-

tle more than a hut in a field) approximately 2km from the far east end of Guanabo. It's a pleasant walk along a quiet road to the beaches.

Getting Around

A large guarded parking area is off Calle 7, between Av de las Terrazas and Av del Sur, near Hotel Tropicoco (CUC\$1 a day from 8am to 7pm). Several other paid parking areas are along Playa Santa María del Mar.

Havanautos (☎ 96 38 45; Calle 500 btwn Avs 5C & D, Guanabo) has an office at Hotel Tropicoco and next door to the Servi-Cupet.

Transtur (Guanabo cnr Calle 478 & Av 9A; Santa María del Mar ☎ 97 15 35; Av de las Terrazas) has its main office between Aparthotel Atlántico and Aparthotel Las Terrazas in Santa María del Mar. It also has desks at the Hotel Tropicoco and the Blau Arenal resorts, and another office in Guanabo, next to Hotel Gran Vía, across the street from the Servi-Cupet on Av 5.

Both **Servi-Cupet** (🕒 24hr; Guanabo ☎ 96 38 58; cnr Av 5 & Calle 464; west of Bacuranao Vía Blanca) gas stations have snack bars. The gas station west of Bacuranao is opposite the military academy.