

Shopping ■

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Shopping

If shopping is one of your favorite vacation pastimes, don't make a special trip to Habana. To the relief of many and the disappointment of a few, Western-style consumerism hasn't yet reached the time-warp streets of Cuba's austere capital. That's not to say you have to walk away empty-handed. Cuba's tourist industry has upped the ante considerably in recent years and specialist shops are spreading fast.

The holy grail for most foreign souvenir hunters is a box of Cuban cigars, closely followed by a bottle of Cuban rum, both of which are significantly cheaper than in stores overseas. Another often overlooked bargain is a bag of Cuban coffee, a potent and aromatic brew made from organically grown beans and best served espresso style with a dash of sugar.

Elsewhere memorabilia is thin on the ground. Aimed strictly at the tourist market, there are cheap dolls, flimsy trinkets, mediocre wood carvings and low-quality leather goods, but Cuba is a world leader in none of these things. Far better as long-lasting souvenirs are salsa CDs, arty movie posters, musical instruments or strings of Santería beads.

In the realm of books you'll find plenty of erudite exposes of Che, Fidel and José Martí in a number of different languages plus a plethora of glossy coffee-table books. Look out in particular for cheap books at the famous secondhand book market (p152) in Plaza de Armas.

Painting is another of Cuba's fortes, and local artists are both numerous and talented. If you buy an original painting, print or sculpture, be sure to ask for a receipt to prove you bought it at an official sales outlet; otherwise, it could be confiscated by customs upon departure (see Exporting Artwork, below).

In a country where clothes were – until recently – rationed, and lycra is still considered to be the height of cool, finding the latest pair of Tommy Hilfiger jeans could prove a little difficult. Incurable fashion junkies can spend their convertibles on *guayaberas* (pleated, buttoned men's shirts) or a yawningly predictable Che Guevara T-shirt. Take your pick.

Opening Hours

Cuba is different to other Latin American countries in that there is no afternoon siesta; however, some stores do close for lunch. In general, opening times are 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday, with some of the more tourist-orientated stores opening on Sunday from 9am to noon.

Consumer Taxes

Most stores list their prices with the tax included. The price you see displayed is thus the price you pay at the till.

Bargaining

Although bargaining is almost nonexistent in shops in Habana, you can try out your haggling skills at open-air markets that sell souvenirs to tourists. If it's your first time in the city, don't expect Moroccan-style deals and discounts; after nearly 50 years of state-sponsored socialism, bartering isn't really part of Cuban culture.

EXPORTING ARTWORK

When buying art at an official outlet, always ask for a receipt to show Cuban customs, especially if the object won't fit in your suitcase.

To discourage private trading of works of art, officials often confiscate undocumented artwork at the airport. If you've purchased a work of art at a state-run gallery and have the receipts, you shouldn't have a problem, but it's always better to have a certificate to export artwork anyway (and you'll definitely need one if you've purchased directly from the artist).

Certificates to export artwork are issued by the **Registro Nacional de Bienes Culturales** (Map pp224-5; 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 and CUC\$30 (which covers from one to five pieces of artwork), and return 24 hours later to pick up the certificate.

It makes sense not to leave this bit of business until your last day.

HABANA VIEJA

Habana Vieja is as good as it gets shopping-wise in Cuba, with plenty of stores and galleries aimed directly at the tourist market.

CASA DEL ABANICO

Map p220

Handicrafts

☎ 863-4452; Obrapia No 107 btwn Mercaderes & Oficios; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat
The Abanico is a small specialist store that sells fine-quality hand-painted fans. It is primarily aimed at the tourist market.

ESTUDIO GALERÍA LOS OFICIOS

Map p220

Art

☎ 863-0497; Oficios No 166; ☎ 10am-5:30pm Mon-Sat
Situated next door to the Galería de Carmen Montilla, this gallery is worth seeing for the large, hectic but intriguing canvases by Nelson Domínguez, whose workshop is upstairs.

FERIA DE LA ARTESANÍA

Map p220

Handicrafts

Tacón btwn Tejadillo & Chacón; ☎ Wed-Sat
Habana's best open-air handicraft market is on Calle Tacón, and sells all kinds of interesting souvenirs. Paintings, *guayaberas*, woodwork, Che everything, leather items and jewelry are all on display and, if you thought communism had put an end to the fine art of business negotiation, try your haggling skills with the amiable stall holders here. If you buy paintings, make sure you arrange an export license (it's easy – see Exporting Artwork, opposite), or you risk losing your loot at customs upon leaving Cuba; if they're deemed 'national treasures' they'll be confiscated. Smaller artworks can be tucked safely in luggage.

GALERÍA DE CARMEN MONTILLA

Map p220

Art

☎ 866-8768; Oficios No 162; ☎ 9:30am-5pm Mon-Sat
This important art gallery is named for Carmen Montilla, a celebrated Venezuelan painter who maintained a studio here until her death in 2004. Spread across three floors, the house exhibits the work of Montilla, plus paintings by other popular Cuban and Venezuelan artists. The rear courtyard features a huge ceramic mural by Alfredo Sosabravo – it's worth a peep.

TOP 10 SOUVENIRS

- Bottle of rum
- Box of cigars
- Movie poster
- Musical instrument
- CD of Cuban music
- *Guayabera* (pleated, buttoned men's shirt)
- Handicraft
- Painting or print
- Secondhand book
- Humidor

GALERÍA MANOS

Map p220

Handicrafts

Obispo No 411 btwn Aguacate & Compostela; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat

This gallery is effectively a small craft outlet, with dolls, masks and other handmade souvenirs supplied by local people. Many of the objects are inspired by the city's vibrant Afro-Cuban community.

GALERÍA VICTOR MANUEL

Map p220

Antiques, Art

Plaza de la Catedral; ☎ 9am-9pm

Taking pride of place in Plaza de la Catedral, this expensive gallery is about as high-end as Habana shopping gets. Displayed in a beautiful baroque building you'll find wonderful humidors, captivating paintings, Tiffany-style glass lamps, fantastic wooden figurines and lots of fine silver jewelry.

HABANA 1791

Map p220

Perfume

☎ 861-3525; Mercaderes No 156; ☎ 9:30am-6pm
A specialist shop that sells perfume made from tropical flowers, Habana 1791 has the air of a working museum. Floral fragrances are mixed by hand and you can see the petals drying in a laboratory out the back.

LA CASA DEL HABANO

Map p220

Cigars

☎ 862-9293; Hostal Conde de Villanueva, Mercaderes No 202; ☎ 9am-6pm
Cigar aficionados flock to this smoky cigar shop situated inside the beautiful Hostal Conde de Villanueva, popularly considered to be the expert's choice. Dodge the rogue cigar sellers on Calle Obispo, and come and join them.

LA CASONA CENTRO DE ARTE

Map p220 **Art**
☎ 861-8544; Muralla No 107; ☎ 10am-5pm
Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat
This state-owned foundation on Plaza Vieja is located in the baroque Casa de los Condes de Jaruco (p69) and sells some fantastic original handicrafts and works of art (with receipts that should allow their export). It also hosts great solo and group shows by up-and-coming Cuban artists.

LA MODERNA POESIA

Map p220 **Books, Music**
☎ 861-6640; Obispo No 527; ☎ 10am-6pm
Mon-Sat
One of Habana Vieja's most comprehensive bookstores, La Moderna Poesia also sells CDs and posters. The store, which fills a bulky art deco building, also has a considerable English-language section.

LONGINA MÚSICA

Map p220 **Instruments, Music**
☎ 862-8371; Obispo No 362; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun
One of Habana Vieja's top-quality music shops, this place has a good selection of CDs, plus musical instruments such as bongos, guitars, maracas, guiros and congas. It often places music speakers in the street outside to grab the attention of passing tourists.

MARCO POLO

Map p220 **Spices**
Mercaderes No 111 btwn Obispo & Obrapía; ☎ 9am-7:30pm
This is a popular spice and herb store that is always busy with both foreigners and locals. Run by Habaguanex, its large range of varied products can be used for both gastronomic and medicinal purposes.

MERCADO DEL ORIENTE

Map p220 **Souvenirs**
☎ Mercaderes No 109 btwn Obispo & Obrapía; ☎ 9am-6pm
Calle Mercaderes (Merchant St) is chockablock with eclectic shops such as this one. Revamped by the City Historian's Office a few years back, the Mercado del Oriente has a Far Eastern theme – the Casa de Asia (p69) is next door – and sells furniture, textiles, porcelain, glass and silver objects from places such as China.

PALACIO DE LA ARTESANÍA

Map p220 **Shopping Mall**
Cuba No 64; ☎ 9am-7pm
For one-stop shopping for souvenirs, cigars, crafts, 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 mayor Mateo Pedroso in 1780; in the mid-19th century it was Habana's high court, and later it became a police headquarters. Today's small stores are gathered around a beautifully shaded central patio replete with verdant plants; it's something akin to an 18th-century version of an American shopping mall, but with oodles of charm.

PUBLICACIONES DE LA OFICINA DEL HISTORIADOR

Map p220 **Books**
Mercaderes No 111 btwn Obispo & Obrapía; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat
The definitive word on Habana Vieja's colonial history can be uncovered here in large, photo-friendly coffee-table books that showcase the development and restoration of Old Habana. The small store sells mainly books, postcards and back copies of the cultural magazine *Opus* (which prints part of its text in English).

SECONDHAND BOOK MARKET

Map p220 **Books**
Plaza de Armas; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat
This is a popular book market held in Habana's oldest square. Amid the Che polemics and the ubiquitous translations of Castro's 'History Will Absolve Me' speech, you can find a few literary gems.

TALLER DE SERIGRAFÍA RENÉ PORTOCARRERO

Map p220 **Art**
Cuba No 513 btwn Brasil & Muralla; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri
The Taller de Serigrafía René Portocarrero has paintings and prints by young Cuban artists in the CUC\$30 to CUC\$150 range. You can see the artists at work here.

TALLER EXPERIMENTAL DE GRÁFICA

Map p220 **Art**
☎ 862-0979; Callejón del Chorro No 6; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri
Habana's funkiest art gallery sells engravings and prints (CUC\$15 to CUC\$800) that

you can see being made on the premises. Edgy and experimental, the painters here offer darker, bolder and more provocative work than found elsewhere in the city.

CENTRO HABANA

Centro Habana is a great place to get acquainted with how the Cubans go shopping – you might even find the odd hidden bargain yourself.

AREA DE VENDEDORES POR CUENTA PROPIA

Map p222 **Market**
Máximo Gómez No 259; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun
The Area de Vendedores por Cuenta Propia is a permanent flea market just beyond the Parque de Fraternidad that is Cuban to the core. Hidden in a hive of buyers and sellers are Santería beads, books, leather belts... the list goes on. Nothing is expensive.

GALERÍA LA ACACIA

Map p222 **Antiques, Art**
☎ 861-3533; San Martín No 114 btwn Industria & Consulado; ☎ 10am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat
This important gallery has paintings by leading artists such as Zaida del Rio, plus antiques. Export permits are arranged.

LA MANZANA DE GÓMEZ

Map p222 **Shopping Mall**
cnr Agramonte & San Rafael
An elegant European-style covered mall built in 1910 and named after then Cuban president José Miguel Gómez, the Manzana is a long way from the resplendent shopping extravaganza of yore. Nonetheless, this huge chunk of mildewed neoclassical real estate is both central and convenient – and hence normally very busy. Hidden away inside the murky and rather cavernous interior you'll find shoe stores, clothing boutiques, an art gallery, a shabby restaurant and El Orbe (p145) bike rentals.

VARIADADES GALIANO

Map p222 **Clothing, Accessories**
cnr San Rafael & Av de Italia; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun
The main shopping streets for Cubans are San Rafael and Av de Italia (Galiano). At the

CLOTHING SIZES

Measurements approximate only, try before you buy

Women's Clothing

Aus/UK	8	10	12	14	16	18
Europe	36	38	40	42	44	46
Japan	5	7	9	11	13	15
USA	6	8	10	12	14	16

Women's Shoes

Aus/USA	5	6	7	8	9	10
Europe	35	36	37	38	39	40
France only	35	36	38	39	40	42
Japan	22	23	24	25	26	27
UK	3½	4½	5½	6½	7½	8½

Men's Clothing

Aus	92	96	100	104	108	112
Europe	46	48	50	52	54	56
Japan	S	M	M	L		
UK/USA	35	36	37	38	39	40

Men's Shirts (Collar Sizes)

Aus/Japan	38	39	40	41	42	43
Europe	38	39	40	41	42	43
UK/USA	15	15½	16	16½	17	17½

Men's Shoes

Aus/UK	7	8	9	10	11	12
Europe	41	42	43	44½	46	47
Japan	26	27	27½	28	29	30
USA	7½	8½	9½	10½	11½	12½

point where the thoroughfares meet stands Variadades Galiano, the Bloomingdales of Cuban department stores (and a former Woolworths), which sells everything from mesh tank tops to old records. With its strangely evocative interior that mixes aspiring 1950s New York with dingy 1970s Moscow, this place offers an authentic glimpse into how Cubans go shopping.

VEDADO

Vedado is home to two of Habana's best shopping malls and a couple of decent art galleries.

GALERÍAS DE PASEO

Map pp224-5 **Shopping Mall**
Calle 1 & Paseo; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun
Galerías de Paseo is a surprisingly upscale shopping center, with even a car dealership. It sells Adidas and Chanel clothes, and other consumer items to tourists and

affluent Cubans. There's a **Bim Bom** (p118) ice-cream parlor here too.

LA HABANA SÍ Map pp224-5 **Music**
cnr Calles L & 23; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat,
10am-7pm Sun

With an enviable location on Habana's busiest traffic intersection, La Habana Sí is a classic music store run by government arts agency Artex. Stacked up inside is a good selection of CDs, books, postcards, crafts, videos and DVDs (of mainly Cuban movies). It's an excellent stop for Cuban-music addicts.

LIBRERÍA ALMA MATER
Map pp224-5 **Books**

☎ 870-2060; cnr San Lázaro & Calle L;
☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat
The Librería Alma Mater contains one of the largest offerings of books in Spanish and English in Cuba.

PLAZA CARLOS III
Map pp224-5 **Shopping Mall**

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. Dresses, radios and bicycles – they're all on sale here. Step in to see the double economy working at a feverish pitch.

SERVANDO GALERÍA DEL ARTE
Map pp224-5 **Art**

cnr Calles 23 & 10; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sat
This cool gallery next to the Cine Charles Chaplín and opposite the Centro Cultural Cinematográfico is in an arty part of town and displays some interesting modern paintings and prints.

STUDIO OF SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ ESCALONA Map pp224-5 **Art**

Callejón de Hamel No 1054; ☎ 10am-6pm
Since 1990 a local painter named Salvador González Escalona has converted Callejón de Hamel into an open-air art center with vivid murals and funky street sculpture. Salvador has a studio at No 1054, where his paintings may be viewed (and purchased), and the studio organizes free cultural activities in the street outside.

PLAYA & MARIANAO

Playa and Marianao boast a couple of music outlets, a leading cigar store and Habana's only true 'boutique.'

CASA DE LA MÚSICA MIRAMAR
Map pp228-9 **Music**

☎ 204-0447; cnr Av 35 & Calle 20; ☎ 10am-10pm
An outlet of Egrem, Cuba's national music recording and publishing company, at

Miramar's Casa de la Música (p137), this place has an excellent selection of CDs.

EGREM TIENDA DE MÚSICA
Map pp228-9 **Instruments, Music**

☎ 202-7922; Calle 18 No 103; ☎ 9am-6pm
Mon-Sat
Of the various Egrem stores spread across the capital, this is one of the best. It specializes in CDs, musical instruments and accessories.

LA CASA DEL HABANO
Map pp228-9 **Cigars**

☎ 206-9509; cnr Av 5 & Calle 16; ☎ 10am-6pm
Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun
Along with the Casa del Habano (p151) located in the Hostal Conde de Villanueva

in Habana Vieja, this is, arguably, the city's best cigar shop. Features include an upscale cigar salesroom, a smoking room where you can purchase individual cigars, and a celebrated bar-restaurant, La Casa de Quinta y 16 (p125).

LA MAISON
Map pp228-9 **Clothing, Accessories**

☎ 204-1541; Calle 16 No 701; ☎ 9am-5pm
Housed in an eclectic Miramar mansion with an Italian Renaissance-style garden, La Maison is Habana's center of haute couture, with a large boutique selling designer clothing, shoes, handbags, jewelry, cosmetics and souvenirs. Models strut the catwalk here in outlandish costumes at a nightly fashion show that includes dinner (p125) and a music performance (p138).

THE CUBAN CIGAR

Groucho Marx, Che Guevara, George Burns, Arnold Schwarzenegger...you don't need to be a subscriber to *Cigar Aficionado* magazine to understand the popularity of the aromatic Cuban cigar. Sigmund Freud allegedly puffed his way through a box a day, Winston Churchill had a size named in his honor, while John F Kennedy reportedly told his press secretary Pierre Salinger to order in a thousand of his favorite Petit Upmanns the night before signing into law the US trade embargo on Cuba.

The unsurpassed quality of Cuban cigars stems from an accidental combination of geography, terrain and skill. Tobacco is grown primarily in the rust red fields of Pinar del Río province in the island's verdant west, and all genuine Cuban cigars are hand rolled by trained 'experts' before being packed in tightly sealed cedar boxes and classified into 42 different types and sizes.

Cuba's flagship brand is Cohiba, created in 1966 for diplomatic use and popularized by Fidel Castro, who used to puff on Cohiba Espléndidos before he gave up smoking for health reasons in 1985. Other international favorites include the Partagás brand, rolled in Habana since 1845; the superstrong Bolívar, named after South America's formidable liberator; the classic Montecristo No 2, another *fuerte* (strong) smoke much admired by Cubans; and the milder Romeo y Julieta brand, invented in 1903 by a Cuban who had traveled widely in Europe.

In terms of purchasing, always avoid buying cigars on the street. These substandard smokes are nearly always of dubious quality, with air pockets and hard wrappings containing protuberances; indeed, some are outright fakes. Good places to wise up on cigars include the Casa del Habano in the Hostal Conde de Villanueva (p151) in Habana Vieja, the Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás (p83) in Centro Habana, and the Casa del Habano (opposite) in Miramar. You can only export 23 single cigars duty free.

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