

Cuba Discovery

Day 1 • Arrive Cuba / Welcome dinner

- Depart to Cuba via your own arranged flight.

You should plan to arrive in Havana by mid-afternoon of your first tour day. Your guide will have your flight information and be monitoring your flight arrival in case there is a delay. Your first tour activity will be your Welcome Dinner.

- On Havana airport arrival proceed through Cuban Immigration. Your carry-ons will be scanned.
- Collect your bags and go through Customs.
- You will meet at the airport, after Customs, by our representative holding a "Cuba Explorer" sign.

A quote paraphrased from Lonely Planet: "No one could have invented Havana. It's too audacious, too contradictory and - despite 65 years of withering neglect - too damned beautiful. How it does it is anyone's guess. Maybe it's the swashbuckling history still almost perceptible in atmospheric colonial streets; the survivalist spirit of a populace scarred by two wars of independence, a revolution, and a U.S. trade embargo that has lasted longer than any in history; or the indefatigable salsa energy that ricochets off walls and emanates most emphatically from the people. Don't come here with a long list of questions. Just arrive with an open mind and prepare for a long, slow seduction."

- Transfer to your hotel with free time to settle in and get oriented.
 - Your hotel is ideally located for exploring Old Havana.
 - At 7:00 pm meet in the lobby of your hotel to depart for dinner. Your guide will let you know if there is a change in time.
 - Enjoy a delightful rooftop Welcome Dinner at Atelier, a private restaurant set in a charming home built in 1928. When President Barack and Michelle Obama visited Cuba, the First Lady hosted a lunch at the paladar for Cuban businesswomen. (Included)
 - Return to hotel.
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- Your hotel is a short and easy walk to Plaza Vieja, one of the four main squares in Old Havana. It will be active with live music and refreshments from several fun venues. Enjoy.

Day 2 • Vintage American car caravan / Cigar shopping / Tour Old Habana / Craft market / Photo gallery / Floridita / Cannon firing

- Breakfast in your hotel. (Included)
- Step back in time as you glide through Havana in iconic 1950s vintage American cars. The cruise along the Malecon, a picturesque esplanade, roadway, and seawall, evokes the golden era of Cuba's beauty and allure.
- Stop at a select cigar shop in the castle fortress, the Three Magi Kings of El Morro, near the lighthouse. It has a broad selection of premium cigars, rum, and coffee. You can choose your Habanos with the advice of an experienced Cuban aficionado.

Standing on a rocky promontory across the harbor from Old Havana, El Moro played a vital role in Havana's defense since its construction in 1589. A massive iron chain was laid across the water at the harbors entrance and could be raised or lowered as needed. When raised, it acted as a barrier, blocking access to the harbor. This defensive measure was crucial in protecting Havana from pirates and foreign invaders during the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1762, the British captured El Moro and Havana during a surprise land assault. As a part of the 1763 Treaty of Paris, Havana was returned to the Spanish 11 months later in exchange for Florida.

- Morning stroll of Old Habana.

Hola, La Habana Vieja [Hello, Old Havana], "In terms of beauty, only Venice and Paris surpassed Havana," penned Ernest Hemingway. He was alluding to Havana's incredible architecture, art, and, of course, the spirit of its people. Old Havana's four colonial plazas are full of color and personality, with a mix of palatial buildings, monuments, museums, galleries, churches, lively entertainment, restaurants, and bars. Together, the four plazas of Old Havana contain the most extensive collection of Spanish colonial-era architecture in Latin America. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, restoration and care of Old Havana's wonders lies with the Office of the Historian of Havana.

Plaza de San Francisco [San Francisco Square] is one of the oldest plazas in the historical quarter. The Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, with its construction beginning in 1548 is a striking example of Cuban baroque architecture.

Plaza de Armas [Square of Arms] was a military parade ground for Spanish soldiers. It is the site of the Palace of the Captain Generals, built between 1776 and 1792, and served as the residence of the Spanish colonial governors. Today, it houses the Museum of the City of Havana, showcasing artifacts from Cuba's rich history.

Ernest Hemingway lived near Plaza de Armas at the Hotel Ambos Mundos for several years in the 1930s. He rented room number 511 on the upper floor of the hotel for \$1.50 per night until mid-1939 before moving to Finca Vigía, west of Havana. The historic estate is where he began his work on *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), finished his book *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), and started his novels *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and *To Have and Have Not* (1937). The room where the Nobel Prize-winning writer stayed at Hotel Ambos Mundos has been transformed into a small museum, displaying several of his personal belongings. It is open to visitors during the day.

Plaza Vieja [Old Square] was the only civic square of colonial times. In contrast to the churches and government buildings of the other plazas, only opulent aristocratic 17th-century mansions surround the 'Old Square.' Today, with its small cafes, it is a buzz for nightlife.

Cathedral Square is the most beautiful 18th-century colonial plaza in Latin America. Its centerpiece is the baroque masterpiece Catedral de San Cristóbal de La Habana erected in 1748 by the Jesuit order and showcases towers of unequal height. Christopher Columbus' remains lay in the Cathedral between 1796 and 1898 before they were taken to Seville Cathedral, Spain. The Cathedral of Havana celebrates mass on Sundays at 10:30 am and Thursdays at 6:00 pm.

According to local lore, one of Ernest Hemingway's favorite drinks was the Mojito, which he drank often at one of his frequented bars, La Bodeguita del Medio, near Cathedral Square in Old Havana.

- Visit Taller Experimental de Grafica (Experimental Graphics Workshop), Cuba's oldest print making studio.
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Paraphrased from Smithsonian Magazine: “Lithography arrived in Cuba to protect the integrity of the country’s cigar industry. By the early 1800s, Cuban cigar exports had a prestige that made them valuable throughout the world, and they wanted to protect the Cuban industry from counterfeiters. Using lithography, they could make seals and rings that both decorated their products and distinguished them from those of competitors. Cuba imported thousands of lithographic limestones from Germany in the 1800s. In the 1950s, shortly before the Revolution, aluminum replaced lithography, and the stones fell into disuse.

Campesinos (farmers) used the stones to make walking paths through muddy fields. During the Cuban Missile Crisis Habaneros (people from Havana) laid the lithographic stones and other rocks around the city to serve as barricades against an invasion.

Cuban lithography would have died but for the few artists who lobbied the new Revolutionary government to protect the stones. In 1962, as minister of industry and in the name of art, Che Guevara signed a mandate to provide materials, space, and machines to Cuban lithographers. The Taller Experimental Graphics Workshop was born.

As you stroll the historic cobblestone streets of Old Havana you will experience the sensations Ernest Hemingway felt amongst century’s old architecture.

- Lunch at El Rum Rum de la Habana, a private restaurant with wonderful seafood in the heart of Old Havana. You will be treated to live music and a welcoming staff. (Included)
 - Time to shop for souvenirs at the Old San Jose Warehouses, a large craft market in an old maritime warehouse by the Bay. The persistent vendors offer some of the most recognizable Cuban tchotchkes: garish-colored paintings by local artists, guayaberas (short-sleeve, open-neck Cuban shirts), sculptures, leather, jewelry, coffee mugs, and various trinkets & gadgets bearing the image of Che Guevara.
 - Visit the Galería Raúl Corrales. This boutique gallery displays the photography works of Raul Corrales, Fidel Castro's official photographer from 1959 to 1961. He was one of the best of a small group that became known as Cuba's "epic revolutionary photographers". His photos of Castro, Ché Guevara, the guerrillas, and peasants before, during and after the Cuban Revolution established him. Among his early subjects was Ernest Hemingway, who lived in Cuba for almost twenty years.
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Your visit to the private gallery will be hosted by Claudia Corrales, granddaughter of Raúl Corrales. An accomplished photographer in her own right, Claudia serves as a resource person for National Geographic Photographic Expeditions in Cuba. Gallery Limited Edition prints of Raul Corrales' works are available and come with the Gallery Stamp and a Certificate of Authenticity. Also, available are works by contemporary Cuban photographers.

- Optional drop-in at the Floridita, perhaps the most famous bar in Cuba. It's the cradle of the Daiquiri and homage to Nobel Prize winner, Ernest Hemingway. In 1932 the American novelist fished swordfish off the north coast of Cuba. The same year, he settled at the Ambos Mundos hotel in Old Havana, just a few hundred yards from the Floridita. There he began the final version of his work, "For Whom the Bells Toll".

As the story is told, one morning Hemingway was walking on Obispo Street - where both the Floridita and Ambos Mundos are located - when he stepped into the bar to go to the toilet. The drinks the patron were enjoying piqued his curiosity, and he tried one. After taking a sip, he remarked, "That's good, but I prefer mine without sugar and with double the rum." Hemingway returned to the Floridita each morning at around ten o'clock, settling into his favorite corner stool at the bar. His driver would bring the daily newspapers, and he would enjoy his specially prepared daiquiri.

Hemingway shared the Floridita with his friends the Duke of Windsor, Gene Tunney, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, Gary Cooper, Spanish bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguin, Ava Gardner, Tennessee Williams, Katharine Hepburn, Errol Flynn, and Spencer Tracy. Even when Ernest Hemingway lived in the Finca Vigía and no longer in the Hotel Ambos Mundos, he drove from his home to the bar just to drink his beloved daiquiri. According to legend, after 2, 3, 4 daiquiris he came up with the idea for his book "For Whom the Bell Tolls".

Enjoy live music, have a daiquiri, and take your picture with the life-sized bronze statue of Ernest Hemingway sitting at the writer's 'regular place'.

- Return to your hotel.
 - Dinner. (Not Included) This is a perfect evening to explore Old Havana's paladars within easy walking distance of your hotel.
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- Optional & Independent: Enjoy refreshments on the rooftop of the Ambos Mundos Hotel, located at the corner of Calle Obispo and Mercaderes Streets near Plaza de Armas in Old Havana. It is just a brief and easy walk from your hotel. Savor live music, take in the great view, and immerse yourself in Hemingway's history.
- Attend El Canonazo, a centuries-old Havana tradition. At 9 o'clock, a cannon was fired from the colonial Fortress of San Carlos de Cabana on the north side of the Harbor to signal the imminent closure of the gates to the Old City. A massive iron chain was also raised from the water and stretched across the entrance to the Harbor to keep pirates from sailing in.

Day 3 • Valley of magnificent mogotes / Balcony of the valley / Stroll Viñales / Visit a family farm / Wine & cheese at sunset

- Breakfast in your hotel. (Included)
- Morning departure west to the rural agricultural province of Pinar del Río.
- Brief stop at Las Barrigonas, a clean, a friendly staffed rest stop with fresh squeezed fruit juices, one of the best Pina Coladas, a snack grill and gift shop.
- Drive through the picturesque Viñales National Park, many consider the most beautiful nature spot on the island, in the heart of Cuba's prime tobacco growing region. The small town of Vinales, population 29,000, sits in the center of a flat valley surrounded by stunning formations known as mogotes.

The small rural community of Vinales has less of an opportunity of donations than Havana. You may wish to give gifts there. We will be glad to give you guidance.

- Lunch at private restaurant Balcón del Valle (Balcony of the Valley) and you will see why when you get there, one of the most spectacular views of the entire trip. You will have the opportunity to visit the kitchen, chat with the cooks preparing the food over a charcoal fire; it is rustic and wonderful. (Included)

You will be joined for lunch by a friend, Cesar, whose family has lived for multi-generations in the Valley. He will tell his story of life in rural Cuba and serve as your local host while in Vinales.

- Lodging check-in.
 - Walk the main street of Vinales with César as he shares insights about his hometown.
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- Drop by the open-air craft market.
- Visit a family farm which grows organic vegetables and produces artisanal cheese in limited quantities. The small-scale cheese and vegetable production supplies their small paladar in town. The head to the veranda for wine and cheese sampler to enjoy the sunset on the mogotes.
- Dinner at Cubar, on the main street. Acclaimed by many as the best paladar in Vinales. It has a classy aura with fresh flowers at the bar, candles on the tables and extra virgin olive oil to dress the salad. The menu infuses Cuban and European tastes. (Included)
Evening to enjoy the small-town nightlife.

Day 4 • Valley by horse / Tobacco, honey & coffee / Panoramic view

- Breakfast in your Vinales lodging. (Included)
 - Your morning horseback/ horse drawn cart ride will be in the National Park, surrounded by the mogotes formed during the Jurassic period. You will be accompanied by Cesar and an experienced campesino as you trek amongst fields where oxen still plow. A demonstration of cigar rolling is first up, and during the leisurely ride, up close to the mogotes, you will stop to see honey and coffee production. The morning excursion is memory making.
 - Your horse will take you directly to a family-owned finca in the Valley for lunch. Walking the grounds you will see fruit trees, orchids, vegetables and herbs. This is an outstanding photo opportunity. (Included)
 - Enjoy a short motor coach ride to a scenic viewpoint, offering a panoramic view of Vinales Valley. Towering limestone formations, known as mogotes, rise up to 985 feet, with bases stretching as much as a mile. This unique karst terrain was submerged in the Atlantic Ocean 200 million years ago during the Jurassic Period, eventually emerging to become Cuba.
 - Return to your lodging to refresh & relax.
 - Dinner. (Not included) There are a number of small paladares on the main street. A suggestion is El Olivo for cold meats with cheese and salad from the finca you visited the day before.
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Day 5 • Havana return / Hemingway's home / Art studio / Iconic Hotel Nacional / Internationally acclaimed Tropicana

- Breakfast in your Vinales lodging. (Included)
- Depart Vinales.
- To be efficient on time, a lunch of freshly made sandwiches will be enjoyed while traveling on board your motor coach. You will have 4 choices: ham & cheese, cheese & ham, ham, or cheese!! (Included)
- Southeast of Havana, in the small town of San Francisco de Paula, you visit Finca Vigía—Ernest Hemingway's home and farm. He lived longer in his Cuba residence than any of his other homes, almost twenty years. It was there he accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature and wrote portions of *A Moveable Feast*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Islands in the Stream* and much of *The Old Man and the Sea*. You will meet the docents and curators who affectionately look after original furniture, artwork, personal memorabilia, & other objects collected by the author.

Of special note is the author's library containing thousands of irreplaceable letters & telegrams, photographs, scrapbooks, manuscripts, & galley proofs. His boat *Pilar*, made famous from Papa's Marlin fishing and hunting German submarines off the northern coast of the island, is on the grounds.

You will have a bit of time for a refreshment, visit the souvenir shop and enjoy live music on the grounds of the finca where Papa penned some of his greatest works.

- Visit the Studio and Workshop of Beatriz Santacana, located in the trendy Miramar neighborhood of Ambassador Residences. The works of this noted artist depicts everyday people as the main characters. Her ceramic sculptures, paintings, and drawings welcome you for a relaxing studio visit.
 - Arrive your Habana hotel.
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- Dinner at Iván Chef Justo, a private restaurant housed in a building dating back to 1766, featuring unique décor and ambiance. Chef Ivan studied in Montreal and was once Fidel Castro's chef. The restaurant has a series of levels, and an eclectic collection of photos of Old Havana, colorful art, black and white portraits of Hollywood film stars, patterned plates, and knickknacks like from your grandmother's house. The restaurant of Cuban food fusion has hosted the likes of Mick Jagger and Chef Guy Fieri. (Included)
- TOUR HIGHLIGHT / OPTIONAL EXCURSION: The Tropicana is a Cuban international icon. The cabaret dates to 1939 and served as the center of Cuba's jet-set nightlife during the 1940s and 1950s. It's a glimpse of pre-revolution Cuba, where Carmen Miranda, Josephine Baker, Nat King Cole, and others dazzled wealthy guests with Latin dance numbers. Women with 10-pound headdresses performed. It is located on a tropical six-acre garden estate in the Miramar neighborhood, the most glamorous section of Havana during the 1950s.

The Tropicana helped spread Cuban culture globally and the performers created the showgirl-era. The lavish costumes and vibrant dance styles quickly spread from Cuba to Las Vegas, New York, and Paris.

A full orchestra, loud colors, sultry rhythms, contortionists & acrobats provide a production of more than 200 singers and dancers that will entertain you under the stars. There is a dress code of 'casual elegance' at the Tropicana. Women should not wear shorts, and men are asked to wear long pants, not jeans, a collared shirt and closed shoes. (This is an optional excursion and details on booking will be sent to you when you register.)

Day 6 • Hemingway by The Sea / Organic garden / Private cooking lesson / Panoramic view / Your last night in Cuba – enjoy!

- Breakfast in your hotel. (Included)
 - Travel a short distance to Cojimar, a charming fishing village east of Havana. This quaint coastal enclave held a special place in Ernest Hemingway's heart, as it was his favorite fishing port in Cuba and served as the inspiration for his iconic 1952 novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*. The novel itself achieved great acclaim, earning the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. In a generous gesture, he donated the Nobel medal to the Cuban people, emphasizing his deep connection to the island.
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As you arrive at Cojimar's harbor, you'll find yourself standing where Hemingway's legendary boat, *Pilar*, was once moored. It was from this spot that Papa (as Hemingway was affectionately known) and Cojimar native Gregorio Fuentes, his trusted companion, would set sail on daring expeditions—whether in pursuit of marlins or even on covert missions to track German submarines during World War II.

At the water's edge, a metal bust of Hemingway stands, a tribute lovingly donated by the local fishermen. Capture this poignant moment with photos against the backdrop of the 17th-century Spanish Lookout Fort, which has witnessed centuries of maritime history.

La Terraza, a rustic fisherman's bar perched on the Bay of Cojimar, played a pivotal role in Hemingway's life. Here he would dock his beloved boat, *Pilar*, and spend afternoons in the company of the local fishermen. Among them was Fuentes, who some believe served as the real-life inspiration for *The Old Man and the Sea* novel's central character—Santiago.

And then there's the intriguing connection to Manolo, the young boy in Hemingway's tale. Some say that Manolo was modeled after the young son of La Terraza's owner, aptly named Manolito.

- Explore the charming organic garden tended to by brothers Jesus and Julio. Here, they unveil the art of cultivating herbs, vegetables, and fruits, most destined for the private restaurant you will soon be and to the local senior center. You will see Mango trees, their golden skins ripe with tropical sweetness, Bananas, curving gracefully from sturdy stalks, Plantains, versatile and awaiting transformation into dishes, Squash, in the sun-kissed soil, Avocado trees, their leaves casting dappled shade, Coffee plants, their glossy leaves promising a rich brew. If fortune smiles upon you, perhaps you will get a glimpse of the Cuban Emerald Hummingbird flitting amidst the foliage.

The organic garden, nestled within a quiet residential neighborhood, serves as both a vital supplier for the local restaurant and a source of produce for the family. Witness firsthand how sustainable practices flourish, bridging the gap between nature's bounty and culinary creativity.

And here's a thoughtful touch: If you have donations you wish to give this would be a good place. The brothers give part of their garden harvest to the local school and a senior center, and they will see the gifts are properly distributed.

- **UNIQUE:** Lunch. (Included) In this picturesque fishing village, just a few blocks from the bay, you'll find yourself at the paladar El Ajiaco, where a culinary experience awaits. It wears its humble charm with pride, a place where flavors matter more than frills. Food networks from around the world have sought out its unassuming warmth, and even notable celebrities like Kevin Bacon and Sigourney Weaver have stepped through its doors.

Your cooking and mojito-making lessons take center stage. Imagine working side by side with humorous and talented chefs, shaping dishes that celebrate Cuba's flavors: Lobster, succulent and brimming with ocean essence, Ropa Vieja, the tender shredded beef stewed in aromatic spices, and Ajiaco soup, a hearty blend of root vegetables and herbs. But there's more—the barkeep beckons. You'll craft a special Cuban mojito, balancing mint, lime, honey, and rum. Sip it slowly, savoring the moment.

This experience isn't just about food; it's about connecting with Cuba's soul, one delicious bite at a time.

- **UNIQUE:** In this picturesque fishing village, just a few blocks from the bay, you will go to the paladar El Ajiaco. The private restaurant wears its humble charm with pride, a place where flavors matter more than frills. Food networks from around the world have visited its unassuming warmth, and notable celebrities like Kevin Bacon and Sigourney Weaver have stepped through the doors.

Your cooking and mojito-making lessons takes center stage. You will work side by side with humorous and talented Cuban chefs, shaping multiple dishes that celebrate the island's flavors: Lobster, succulent and brimming with ocean essence, Ropa Vieja, the tender shredded beef stewed in aromatic spices, and Ajiaco soup, a hearty blend of root vegetables and herbs. But there's more—the barkeep beckons. You will craft yourself a special Cuban mojito, balancing mint, lime, honey, and rum. Savor the moment.

Roll up your sleeves, stir the pots, and raise your glass. This experience isn't just about food; it's about connecting with Cuba's soul, one delicious bite at a time. (Included)

- En route back to Havana, you will pause to take in the breathtaking panoramic view of Havana and the bay.

Casablanca, the small hamlet below on the water's edge, traces its origins to 1762. It is where shipbuilders toiled, shaping vessels that would sail across the ocean. These galleons, laden with spoils from South America, were destined for the royal court of Spain.

Overlooking the Bay of Havana, stands the Christ of Havana—Cristo de La Habana. The colossal statue carries a tale of its own—a promise made by the wife of dictator President Fulgencio Batista. After an assassination attempt on the US-backed leader in 1957, she commissioned the monument to be a symbol of faith and protection. It was crafted in Italy and the 67 white marble blocks were blessed by Pope Pius XII himself.

Irony dances in the details: On Christmas Day 1958, the statue was unveiled and one-week later Batista fled Cuba in the early morning hours as the Revolutionary army entered Havana.

- Return to your hotel for independent time.
- Dinner. (Not included) After enjoying excellent food throughout your tour, take this opportunity to dine at a privately owned restaurant you've been curious about.
- Independent (Not included): Evening of Jazz at La Zorra y El Cuervo (the Fox & Raven). One of the best jazz clubs in Havana. It is small and intimate. The entrance to the underground club is through a British telephone booth. They open at 10pm, the show is at 11pm, and it closes at 2am.

Jazz pulses through the veins of Cuba—a rhythm that transcends mere music. Picture the 1940s: Cuban drummer Luciano “Chano” Pozo and American jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie collide in a creative explosion. Their collaboration generated something extraordinary—the fusion of Afro-Cuban rhythms and jazz melodies. This groundbreaking blend danced across borders, creating the genre we now know as Latin Jazz.

- Independent (Not included): Enjoy the evening at Fabrica de Arte Cubano, Cuban Art Factory (F.A.C.), a former cooking oil plant, built in 1910, has become world-famous. The mixed-use arts space has several bars, live theater, jazz, contemporary dance, concerts, DJs, and rotating art exhibitions is open 8:00 pm – 3:00 am.
- Your last night in Cuba. Disfruta de la noche (enjoy the night)!

Day 7 • Havana / Departure

If you wish to stay in Havana for the weekend your hotel stay will be extended and Sunday transport to the airport will be provided. The weekend would be independent time for you to explore Havana on your own. Information on booking the extension will be sent to you after your tour registration is received.

- Breakfast in your hotel. (Included)
 - Transport will be provided to José Martí International Airport in Havana for your flight home.
 - Airlines recommend you be at your departure airport 3 hours before takeoff. Please prepare accordingly. Your guide will meet you in the lobby of your hotel.
 - After you clear Cuban Immigration, you will be screened and your carry on will be scanned. In the departure hall there is a duty-free shop, places to buy snacks and drinks, as well as souvenirs. You may log in for a free half hour of Wi-Fi.
 - When you arrive at your U.S. entry airport you will need to clear U.S. Immigration and U.S. Customs. If asked by an Immigration Officer about your trip to Cuba, note that you were on a sanctioned Support of the Cuban People tour. If asked what you did, tell the truth, and explain it was an opportunity to directly engage and support the Cuban people, to learn about their life and country. To be clear: You were not on a vacation.
 - Memories of a wonderful visit to the Pearl of the Antilles: Cuba! (Included)
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