

This is Cuba

Cuba History

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CUBAN HISTORY

A Spanish Colony

Christopher Columbus discovered the island of Cuba on October 27, 1492, during his initial voyage to find a westerly route to the Orient. As gathered from his chronicles, the exotic beauty of the island left him absolutely spell-bound. In his essay about the discovery of Cuba, he passionately describes it as “ the most beautiful land human eyes have ever seen”.

Before the Europeans arrived, Cuba was inhabited by three different cultures: the Ciboneyes, the Guanahatabeyes and the Tainos. The Tainos were the most advanced. They were fishermen, hunters, and agriculturists. They grew maize (corn), yams, beans, squash, yucca, cotton and tobacco. They were skilled in woodwork and pottery. By the time the Spanish arrived, about 100 000 native Indians lived peacefully in the island.

Cuba's size and diversity of landscape no doubt convinced Columbus that he had indeed found Asia. It wasn't until 1508 that Sebastián de Ocampo, another Spanish navigator and explorer, circumnavigated Cuba, proving that it was an island.

In 1511, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar set out with three ships and an army of 300 men from La Espanola (Hispaniola), east of Cuba, with orders from Spain to conquer the island. The new settlers were to be greeted with stiff resistance from the local Taíno population under the leadership of Hatuey, a cacique (chieftain) who had fled to Cuba from La Espanola to escape the brutalities of Spanish rule on that island. After a prolonged resistance, Hatuey was captured and burnt alive, and within three years the Spanish had gained control of the island.

Diego Velázquez established seven main settlements in the new colony: Baracoa, Bayamo, Santiago, Puerto Principe, Trinidad, Sancti Spiritus and Havana.

Due to its favorable geographic location at the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico, Cuba served as a transit point for Spanish treasure fleets carrying the wealth of the colonies to Spain. Havana's superb harbor with an easy access to the Gulf Stream soon turned the village into the capital of the New World. These riches attracted the attention of pirates such as Frenchman Jacques de Sores who attacked Havana in 1555.

By the mid of the 16th century slavery, malnutrition, diseases, suicide and overwork had drastically reduced the native population of Cuba. This caused the Spanish to rely on the African slaves.

Economically, there was little gold in Cuba, but agriculture more than made up for it. Cattle raising and tobacco became the most important industries. Sugar cane was introduced to Cuba on Columbus' second voyage but the expansion of sugar cultivation was limited by a lack of slaves.

By the second half of the 18th century, Spain became involved in the Seven Years' War between Britain and France. In August 1762 the British captured Havana and held the island for eleven months. In July 1763 Cuba was returned to Spain in exchange for Florida. The British occupation and the temporary lifting of Spanish

restrictions showed the local landowning class the economic potential of trading their commodities with England and North America.

Towards the end of the 18th century, Cuba began its transformation into a slave plantation society. After the French Revolution, there were slave uprisings in the nearby colony of Haiti. French planters fled what had been the most profitable colony in the Caribbean and settled across the water in Cuba, bringing their expertise with them.

They set up coffee plantations and modernized the Cuban sugar industry. Cuba soon became a major sugar exporter and, after 1793, slaves were imported in huge numbers to work the plantations. The island was under absolute military control with a colonial elite that made its money principally from sugar.

By the mid of the 19th century, Cuba was producing about a third of the world's sugar and was heavily dependent on African slaves to do so. Diplomatic pressure from Britain forced Spain to agree to halt the slave trade but the import of African slaves continued. It is estimated that almost 400,000 Africans were brought to the island between 1835 and 1864. Slavery was not abolished until 1886.

The Fight for Independence

The first large-scale war for Cuban independence began on October 10, 1868 with a historic proclamation known as the Grito de Yara (the Cry of Yara). The rebellion was led by landowner Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. At his sugar plantation La Demajagua in the eastern province of Oriente, Céspedes freed his slaves and declared war against Spain. This was the beginning of the so called Ten Years War.

The uprising was supported by other local landowners and continued to spread throughout the eastern region of Cuba. By the end of October, the rebel army had grown to 12,000 men.

The first important city captured by the rebels was Bayamo. On October 20, ten days after the beginning of the war, Bayamo was proclaimed capital of the Republic in Arms and Cuba's National Anthem was sung there for the first time.

Within the first year of the war a young man named Antonio Maceo rose to the unprecedented rank of lieutenant colonel of the Liberating Army and captured the admiration and imagination of black and white Cubans alike.

Maximo Gomez, a former cavalry officer for the Spanish Army in the Dominican Republic, with his extraordinary military skills, taught the Cuban forces what would be their most lethal tactic: the machete charge. Gomez became one of the most important leaders of the independence movement.

In 1878, the Convention of Zanjón brought the war to an end. The agreement granted freedom to all slaves who fought in the war, but slavery was not abolished and Cuba remained under Spanish rule.

During the next 17 years, tension between the people of Cuba and the Spanish government continued. It is during this period when U.S. capital began flowing into the island, mostly into the sugar and tobacco industries and mining. By 1895 investments reached 50 million U.S. dollars. Although Cuba remained Spanish politically, economically it started to depend on the U.S.

On February 24, 1895, a new independence war was started led by the young poet and revolutionary, José Martí. He was joined by Antonio Maceo, Maximo Gomez and Calixto Garcia, all veterans from the previous war. On May the same year, Martí was shot and killed in a brief encounter with the Spanish army. He later became Cuba's National Hero.

Unwilling to repeat the mistakes of the first war of independence, Gomez and Maceo began an invasion to the western provinces. In ninety days and 78 marches, the invading army went from Baraguá (at the eastern tip of the island) to Mantua (the western end) traveling a total of 1,696 kilometers and fighting 27 battles.

The USA was now concerned for its investments in Cuba and was considering its strategic interests within the region. In January 1898 the US battleship Maine was sent to Havana to protect US citizens living in the island. When the ship mysteriously exploded in Havana harbor on 15 February 1898, killing 266 American sailors, this was made a pretext for declaring war on Spain. The American cry of the hour became Remember the Maine!

Hostilities started hours after the declaration of war when a US contingent under Admiral William T. Sampson blockaded several Cuban ports. The Americans decided to invade Cuba and to start in Oriente where the Cubans had almost absolute control and were able to co-operate. The first US objective was to capture the city of Santiago de Cuba.

Future US president Theodore Roosevelt personally led the celebrated charge of the 'Rough Riders' up San Juan Hill and claimed a great victory. The port of Santiago became the main target of naval operations. The Battle of Santiago de Cuba, on 3 July 1898, was the largest naval engagement during the Spanish-American War resulting in the destruction of the Spanish Caribbean Squadron.

In December 1898 a peace treaty was signed in Paris by the Spanish and the Americans. The Cubans were excluded.

The Spanish troops left the island in December 1898 and an American military government was immediately proclaimed in Cuba. After many years of struggle, the Cuban people had gained independence from Spain but found themselves under US military occupation for the next four years.

The Republican times

The Republic of Cuba was proclaimed on 20 May 1902 and the Government was handed over to its first president, Tomás Estrada Palma.

Although the U.S. forces withdrew from Cuba, the Americans retained almost total control over the Island. As a precondition to Cuba's independence the US had demanded that the Platt Amendment be approved fully and without changes by the Cuban Constituent Assembly as an appendix to the new constitution. Under this amendment the US kept the right to intervene in Cuban domestic affairs "to preserve its independence".

The amendment also allowed the United States to establish a naval base at the mouth of the Guantánamo Bay which they occupy to this day.

By the 1920's US companies owned two thirds of Cuba's farmland and most of its mines. A series of weak, corrupt, dependant governments ruled Cuba during the next decades.

In 1925 Gerardo Machado was elected president of Cuba on a wave of popularity. However, a drastic fall in sugar prices in the late 1920s led to protests which he forcefully repressed. In 1928 through bribes and threats he 'persuaded' Congress to grant him a second term of office, which was greeted with strikes and protests from students, the middle classes and labor unions. Machado's police forces arrested students and opposition leaders, whom they tortured or killed.

The United States, attempting to find a peaceful solution to Cuba's political situation, sent special envoy Sumner Welles to mediate between government and opposition. Welles's efforts finally led to a general strike and an army revolt which forced Machado to leave the country on Aug. 12, 1933.

Carlos M. Céspedes, the son of Cuba's legendary leader, took over as provisional president. Shortly later, on 5 September 1933, a revolt of non-commissioned officers including sergeant Fulgencio Batista, deposed the government and installed a five-member committee with Ramón Grau San Martín as president.

One of the appointed Ministers of the new government was Antonio Guiteras who implemented important radical changes in the country. He sets up an 8-hour working day, establishes a Department of Labor, grants peasants the right to own the land they were farming, reduces electricity rates by 40 percent, and nationalizes the American-owned Electric Company. US Ambassador Sumner Welles described these reforms as "communistic" and "irresponsible".

The Grau-Guiteras government only lasted 100 days. Fulgencio Batista, by then colonel, staged a coup and held power through presidential puppets until he was elected president himself in 1940. In the same year a new Constitution was passed, which included universal suffrage and benefits for workers such as a minimum wage, pensions, social insurance and an eight-hour day.

In 1944 Ramón Grau San Martín representing the Partido Auténtico (Authentic Party) was elected President. His administration coincided with the end of World War II, and he inherited an economic boom as sugar production and prices rose. He inaugurated a program of public works and school constructions. Social security benefits were increased, and economic development and agricultural production were encouraged. But increased prosperity brought increased corruption. Grau was followed into the presidency by Carlos Prío Socarrás, who held office from 1948 to 1952, a term which was even more corrupt and depraved.

Eduardo Chibás was at the time the leader of the Partido Ortodoxo (Orthodox Party), a liberal democratic group, who was widely expected to win in 1952 on an anticorruption platform. On the 10th of March of 1952, just three months before the scheduled election date, Batista staged a military coup and quickly established a brutal and repressive dictatorship.

The Cuban Revolution

By the 1950's over half of Cuba's land, industry and essential services were in foreign hands.

Since the late 1930s, American mobsters had been involved in Cuban gaming. In 1946, Lucky Luciano gathered America's top gangsters – as well as honored guest Frank Sinatra – at Havana's Hotel Nacional for his infamous Mafia Summit. In the 1950's more than twenty new hotels were built and gambling establishments increased. In 1952, Meyer Lansky became Batista's official advisor of gambling reform. In that capacity Lansky controlled the majority of casino gambling on the island, along with Santo Trafficante. The Riviera and the Hotel Capri opened their casinos in 1957. Other casinos were installed in Havana at the Nacional, Plaza, Seville-Biltmore, Deauville, and Comodoro hotels; in Cienfuegos at Jagua motel; in Varadero at the Internacional; and on the Isle of Pines at the Colony hotel. Newspapers observed that Havana was bidding for the title of the Las Vegas of Latin America.

In reaction to Batista's oppressive and corrupted government, new revolutionary movements started to spring across the Island. These were formed by student and labor organizations, intellectuals, the middle-class, farmers and peasants.

On 26 July 1953 a young lawyer by the name of Fidel Castro led a historic attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, the second most important military base in the country at that time. The attack failed and about 55 rebels were captured, tortured and murdered. Although Fidel and his brother Raúl escaped, they were later captured and put on trial. Fidel used the occasion to make an impassioned speech, denouncing the crimes of Batista's government and its illegitimacy, and the need for radical economic and social changes in Cuba. The speech is known in Cuban history for its final phrase, History will absolve me.

Fidel was sentenced to 15 years, but was released as part of an amnesty in 1955. He departed for Mexico where he met Ernesto "Che" Guevara. While in Mexico, he organized the 26th of July Movement with the goal of overthrowing Batista. By the end of November of the following year, Fidel — along with Che Guevara and 81 other rebels — set sail in the yacht Granma in another attempt to overthrow Batista. On landing, on December 2, the rebels were surprised by an ambush. The 15 survivors — including Fidel, Raul and Che — fled in three separate groups into the impenetrable forests of the Sierra Maestra where they regrouped, reorganized and launched guerrilla attacks that soon gained the support of the vast majority of Cuba's farmers, urban workers and students. Just over two years later, the Rebel Army defeated Batista's forces. On January 1, 1959, the dictator fled the island.

By then United States companies owned about 40 percent of the Cuban sugar lands, almost all the cattle ranches, 90 percent of the mines and mineral concessions, 80 percent of the utilities, practically all the oil industry, and supplied two-thirds of Cuba's imports.

The Rebel Army entered Havana on 8 January 1959. Shortly afterward, a liberal lawyer, Dr Manuel Urrutia Lleó became president. Disagreements within the government culminated in Urrutia's resignation in July 1959. He was replaced by Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado, who served as president until 1976. Fidel Castro became prime minister in February 1959, succeeding José Miró in that post.

Among the first acts of the revolutionary government were cuts in rents and electricity and telephone rates, and the closing of the mafia-controlled gambling industry. State education was immeasurably expanded and a national literacy campaign was launched.

In May 1959, the First Agrarian Reform Laws were launched which redistributed land mostly owned by US companies to small farmers and landless rural workers and banned land ownership by foreigners. American displeasure with these measures was clear and the reaction of the U.S. government was swift. Sugar purchases from Cuba were stopped and were accompanied by other actions aimed to undermine the Revolutionary government's programs. In response, Cuba nationalized American-owned industries, mostly sugar mills. When the U.S. petroleum companies threatened to cut-off oil supplies and paralyze the country, Cuba started purchasing oil from the Soviet Union which the U.S.-owned refineries refused to process. As a result Texaco, Esso, and Shell oil refineries were nationalized. All foreign banks were also nationalized including the First National City Bank of New York, the First National Bank of Boston and the Chase Manhattan Bank.

As the U.S. increased pressure on Cuba, the government of the Revolution sought, and found, new allies in the Soviet Union. By 1960 the USSR had become the main purchaser of Cuban sugar and its most important supplier of petroleum products. On October 19 of the same year the U.S. places a partial trade embargo on Cuba, and ended diplomatic relations with the neighbor island at the beginning of 1961.

As the newly established Cuban Revolution drifted towards a Marxist-Leninist political system, upper class and professional Cubans were leaving the country in droves. In December 1959 Cubans began to send their children to the U.S., afraid of "losing them to communism." Over 14,000 Cuban children who went to the U.S. under this program are known as the Peter Pan kids. At the same time, various newspapers in the U.S., Mexico, and Latin America were running articles warning of an imminent U.S. attack on Cuba.

The recently elected Kennedy administration denied emphatically that an attack on Cuba was planned, but in 1961 an attack took place at Bay of Pigs. The famous aggression began on April 14 when some 1400 Cuban émigrés trained by the CIA in Florida and Guatemala set sail in six ships from Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua. On 15 April, planes from Nicaragua bombed several Cuban airfields in an attempt to wipe out the air force. Seven Cuban airmen were killed in the raid, and at their funeral the next day, Fidel Castro addressed a mass rally in Havana and proclaimed the socialist nature of the Cuban revolution for the first time. On 17 April the invasion flotilla landed at Playa Girón and Playa Larga in the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs), but the men were stranded on the beaches when the Cuban air force attacked their supply ships. Two hundred were killed and the

rest surrendered within three days. A total of 1197 men were captured and eventually returned to the USA in exchange for US\$53 million in food and medicine.

The US reaction was to isolate Cuba, with a full trade embargo and heavy pressure on other American countries to sever diplomatic relations. Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the OAS imposed economic sanctions. However, Canada and Mexico refused to bow to American pressure and maintained relations.

In April 1962, Soviet President Khrushchev decided to install missiles in Cuba, which would be capable of striking anywhere in the USA. In October, President JF Kennedy ordered Soviet ships heading for Cuba to be stopped and searched for missiles in international waters. This led to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Kennedy demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops and arms from Cuba and imposed a naval blockade. Without consulting Castro and without his knowledge, Khrushchev eventually agreed to have the missiles dismantled and withdrawn on condition that the West would guarantee a policy of non-aggression towards Cuba. In November, Kennedy suspended the naval blockade but reiterated US support for political and economic aggression towards Cuba.

The early 60s also witnessed the creation of several organizations and institutions, such as the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), the Union of Cuban Pioneers (OPJM) and the Young Communist League (UJC), geared in part to deepen the roots of the Revolution among its people and throughout the country.

From the very beginning the Cuban Revolution defined itself as internationalist. Although still a third world country itself Cuba supported African, Central American and Asian countries in the field of military, health and education.

Special Period

During the second decade of the Revolution, Cuba became increasingly dependent on Soviet markets and military aid. In 1972 the island becomes a member of the Soviet Union's trade association, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The island's economic and political institutions are increasingly modeled on those of the Soviet Union.

By the mid-1980's the inefficiencies of the economic system had become obvious and Cuba began a process known as the 'rectification of errors' which attempted to reduce bureaucracy and allow more decision-making at local levels.

With the 1989 collapse of the centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe and the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, Cuba lost both its major markets and its primary source of foreign assistance. As a result, the Cuban economy collapsed, and the full effect of the U.S. embargo became evident. The loss of cheap Soviet oil also triggered a Cuban energy crisis. Cuban foreign trade fell 75 percent, and economic output fell 50 percent.

The Cuban Government responded to this economic crisis with a major program of reforms. Initiating market-oriented reforms, allowing foreign investment, and promoting a diversified export program have set the stage for Cuba's economic recovery.

In 1990, Cuba announced a "Special Period in Peacetime" economic austerity program to counter the loss of Soviet support. The program rationed food, fuel, and electricity and gave priority to domestic food production, development of tourism, and biotechnology.

In 1993, the Cuban Government established a new form of cooperative—the Basic Unit of Cooperative Production, or UBPC— initiating the process of breaking up large state farms. While land title remains with the state, these cooperatives have the right to use the land and make production and resource decisions.

In 1994, the Government established farmers' markets, where producers' surplus production can be sold at free-market prices. Cuba also fostered the establishment of foreign "economic associations" (joint ventures, international contracts) to allow increased foreign investment in the tourism, mining, telecommunications, manufacturing, and construction sectors of the Cuban economy.

Since the initiation of reforms, GDP growth, consumption, and production are showing signs of recovery. Major growth areas in the Cuban economy are tourism, nickel and ore production, fisheries, manufacturing, tobacco, and vegetables.

In February 2008, Fidel Castro announced his resignation as President of Cuba and on 24 February his brother Raúl was elected as the new President.

Timeline

27 Oct 1492 - Christopher Columbus lands in Cuba and claims it for Spain.

1511 - Spanish conquest begins under the leadership of Diego de Velazquez.

1522 - After the decimation of the indigenous population, colonial landowners bring in African slaves to work the fields. The first of the slave ships arrives, with many more to follow.

1762 - Havana is captured by a British force led by Admiral George Pocock and Lord Albemarle.

1763 - Havana is returned to Spain in exchange for Florida.

1853 - José Martí, Cuba's national hero is born.

10 Oct 1868 - The Ten Years War over independence from Spain starts.

1878 – End of the Ten Years War. Cuba remained under Spanish rule.

1886 - Slavery is abolished.

24 Feb 1895 - Jose Marti leads a second war of independence.

May 19 1895 - José Martí is killed at Dos Ríos in eastern Cuba. He is 42 years old.

15 Feb 1898 - The USS Maine explodes in Havana's harbor. The U.S. blames Spain, and so begins the Spanish-American War.

10 Dec 1898 - Treaty of Paris is signed. Spain loses their colonies in Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines to the United States. Cuba gains independence from Spain. The United States maintains military control over the island.

1901 – The Platt Amendment is added to the Cuban Constitution. The United States are allowed military bases on the island, and may intervene militarily whenever they deem necessary.

20 May 1902 - Cuba becomes an independent republic with Tomas Estrada Palma as its president; however, the Platt Amendment keeps the island under US protection and gives the US the right to intervene in Cuban affairs.

1906-09 – Estrada Palma resigns and the US occupies Cuba following a rebellion led by Jose Miguel Gomez.

1909 - Jose Miguel Gomez becomes president following elections supervised by the US, but is soon tarred by corruption.

1912 - US forces return to Cuba to help put down black protests against discrimination.

1925 - Gerardo Machado becomes president. His regime is one of the most corrupt and exploitative in the island's political history.

13 Aug 1926 - Fidel Castro is born.

14 Jun 1928 - Ernesto "Che" Guevara is born in Argentina.

1933 - Machado's government is overthrown.

1940 - Fulgencio Batista is elected president. He remains president for four years.

Oct 1945 - Fidel Castro enters law school at the University of Havana.

10 Mar 1952 - Carlos Prío's government is overthrown by Fulgencio Batista's military coup. Batista becomes dictator. This government is openly supported by the United States.

26 July 1953 - Fidel Castro leads an unsuccessful revolt against the Batista regime.

2 December 1956 - Castro lands in eastern Cuba from Mexico and takes to the Sierra Maestra mountains where, aided by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, he wages a guerrilla war.

1 Jan 1959 – Triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro overthrows Batista after months of guerilla warfare. He sets up a provisional government. Batista flees the country.

17 Apr 1961 - The Bay of Pigs invasion. Cuban exiles attempt to invade the island and overthrow Castro's regime. The U.S. government backs the botched mission. The Cuban army easily defeats the rebels, many of whom are killed during the insurrection.

January 1962 – Under US pressure Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS). Canada and Mexico decided to maintain relations.

October 1962 - Cuban missile crisis ignites when, fearing a US invasion, Castro agrees to allow the USSR to deploy nuclear missiles on the island. The crisis was subsequently resolved when the USSR agreed to remove the missiles in return for the withdrawal of US nuclear missiles from Turkey.

9 Oct 1967 - Che Guevara is executed by government troops in Bolivia.

1972 - Cuba becomes a full member of the Soviet-based Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

1976 - Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau visits Cuba.

1990 - Cuba endures a massive recession due to the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

1994 - Cuba signs an agreement with the US according to which the US agrees to admit 20,000 Cubans a year in return for Cuba halting the exodus of refugees.

1998 - Pope John Paul II visits Cuba.

1999 November - Cuban child Elian Gonzalez is picked up off the Florida coast after the boat in which his mother, stepfather and others had tried to escape to the US capsized. A huge campaign by Miami-based Cuban exiles begins with the aim of preventing Elian from rejoining his father in Cuba and of making him stay with relatives in Miami.

2000 June - Elian allowed to rejoin his father in Cuba after prolonged court battles.

2000 October - US House of Representatives approves the sale of food and medicines to Cuba.

2002 January - Prisoners taken during US-led action in Afghanistan are flown into Guantanamo Bay for interrogation as al-Qaeda suspects.

2002 May - Former US president Jimmy Carter makes a goodwill visit which includes a tour of scientific centres, in response to US allegations about biological weapons. Carter is the first former or serving US president to visit Cuba since the 1959 revolution.

2002 June - National Assembly amends the constitution to make socialist system of government permanent and untouchable.

2006 July - President Fidel Castro undergoes gastric surgery and temporarily hands over control of the government to his brother, Raul.

2008 February - Raul Castro takes over as president, days after Fidel announces his retirement.

2009 March - US Congress votes to lift Bush Administration restrictions on Cuban-Americans visiting Havana and sending back money.

2009 June - Organization of American States (OAS) votes to lift ban on Cuban membership imposed in 1962. Cuba welcomes decision, but says it has no plans to rejoin.

2009 July - Cuba signs agreement with Russia allowing oil exploration in Cuban waters of Gulf of Mexico.

CUBAN CULTURE

Cuban Music

Cuban music is exceptionally popular and easily recognized around the globe. The music of Cuba is comprised of numerous genres and styles and has a very long and interesting history that includes African and Spanish influences as well as American, Latin-American, and European styles of music.

One of the most famous aspects of Cuban music is its unique ability to inspire new styles of dance. Dance is the very heart and soul of Cuban music's appeal, and "the son" is certainly the dance at the center of it all. This unique Creole style of dance finds its roots in late 1800's Cuba along the hills on the island's eastern side. The dance is almost equally African and Spanish in its origins and has been the basis of virtually all of the Cuban styles and rhythms of dance that have come since.

One of the most famous dances to originate from "the son" is the salsa. More formally known as Casino, Cuban Salsa blends Son Montuno and dance influences from Mambo, Danzon, Guaguanco, and many other types of folkloric dancing from Afro-Cuban styles. Dancing Casino, or dancing salsa, is a common expression of Cuban social culture, and Latin Americans revere the style as a part of both their cultural and social activities. The style became popularized on the island near the end of the 50's as musicians such as Klimax and Los Van Van began using quicker and more upbeat musical arrangements.

When the nueva trova movement became popular in the 1960's, it was Cuba's young intellectuals and their unique world views who used the movement as a reflection of changing political and social ideologies, with artists like Pablo Milanes and Silvio Rodriguez turning the style into a household name.

One of the biggest events in Cuban musical culture both on the island and abroad was the creation of Buena Vista Social Club in 1997. The recording featured a veritable who's who of Cuban musicians, featuring the likes of Compay Segundo and Ibrahim Ferrer and has sold millions of copies around the globe.

Other forms of dance and music that are famous throughout Cuba include the bolero, the chachacha, the danzon, the guaracha, and the rumba

Cuban Literature

Recorded Cuban literature dates as far back as 1605 to a poem titled Espejo de Paciencia written by Silvestre de Balboa. The epic poem told the tale of the struggle between a French pirate and a bishop from Spain and, although it is now valued only for its history, it was quite an esteemed and prestigious work during its time.

It is in the early 19th century that Cuban literature really began to emerge as its own unique style of writing. The turning point for Cuba literature is regarded to have come with the lyrical poetic works of Jose Maria Heredia (1803-1839), with his famed Oda al Niagara and En el teocalli de Chobula being considered the start to the Spanish Romanticism style of writing.

During this time, most of the major Cuban literature produced was themed around such issues as slavery, the desegregation of the races in Creole society, and colonialism. The genre saw a few notable writers, including Cirilo Villaverde (1812-1894) and Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda (1814-1873). Villaverde's work, Cecilia Valdes, is largely considered to be one of Cuban literature's most important pieces.

By far, the most famous writer in Cuban literature and the one with the most influence is Jose Marti (1853-1895). Working as a journalist, essayist, political theorist, a poet, and a revolutionary philosopher, his work prominently utilized such themes as democracy, freedom, and liberty. He wrote a number of unique pieces,

including children's magazines, poems, a novel, letters, poems, and essays, with children's books such as *The Golden Age*, or *La Edad de Oro*, being by far the most famous and widely read.

His book of poetry, *Ismaelillo*, was written for his son. The work is largely considered as a guide to being a parent and a father. The poems in the work describe the anguish that Martí felt during his exile, when he and his son were separated.

His book *Versos Sencillos* describes Martí's strong love of Cuba and his adoration for nature, as well as his deep-seated feelings about injustice and the high importance he placed on friendship. Many of his most famous poems are found in this book due to the very personal way in which he wrote about his feelings and experiences, and such works have helped Martí gain renown as one of the Spanish American Modernismo literary movement's biggest contributors.

By the 1920's and 30's, the Afro-Cubanismo movement helped propel Cuba and its literature in the direction of Afro-Cuban culture. The literature of this time period is definably Cuban in every respect, blending the African roots of the island's inhabitants seamlessly with their distinctly Cuban creativity and style. Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), Cuba's National Poet, is certainly regarded as the most famous writer of the movement, with his book of son poetry, *Motivos de Son* (1930) commonly regarded as his finest work.

The technique known as *lo real maravilloso* used magical realism to help explore Latin American culture and history's more fantastic qualities. Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) is considered one of the first to use the technique, with his 1949 work *The Kingdom of This World*, or *El Reino de Este Mundo*, about the 18th century Haitian revolution showing distinct Afro-Cuban influences. Other works by Carpentier, including *El Siglo de las Luces* and *Los Pasos Perdidos* remaining some of the highest regarded Latin American literary works.

The work known as *Paradisio*, by José Lezama Lima (1910-1976) created great scandal within Cuba in the post-Revolution period. The novel explored the theme of homosexual relationships. Lima himself was largely a poet and is considered to be among the main forces behind Cuban literature's *criollismo* movement during the 1940's and 50's.

The genre of literature known as testimonial literature actually has its roots in Cuba, where its master, Miguel Barnet (b. 1940) wrote the 1966 masterpiece *Biografía de un Cimarrón*.

There have been many other noteworthy Cuban literary figures throughout the island's history, including Guillermo Cabrera Infante (b. 1929), whose work *Tres Tristes Tigres* explored the nightlife of Havana during the dictatorship of Batista, as well as Dulce María Lovnáz (1902-1997) who, despite publishing only the novel *Jardín*, is largely considered one of the precursors of the magical realism genre.

Cuba's Painting

Cuba has been home to a number of talented and famous artists throughout its history, particularly in the time period from 1900 to 1975. Of course, as our Cuba cultural travel guides can tell you, the history of Cuban painting extends back much farther.

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Cuban art was dominated by religious paintings and portraits. This time period saw the rise of artists such as Juan del Río (1748-?), Vicente Escobar (1762-1834), and José Nicolás de la Escalera (1734-1833).

In 1818, a world renowned French painter by the name of Jean Baptiste Vermeier (1786-1833) was appointed as the first director of the new Academy of Fine Arts "San Alejandro" which influenced all artistic production in Cuba until the 1920's.

During the 19th century, primary trends in academic style landscape painting were realism, commonly seen in works by artists such as Guillermo Collazo (1850-1896) and Valentin Sanz Carta (1849-1896), and romanticism such as that displayed in the works of Jose Joaquin Tejada (1867-1943) and Esteban Chartrand (1840-1883).

Two of Cuba's most renowned painters, Armando Menocal (1863-1942) and Leopoldo Romanach (1862-1951) served the Academy of San Alejandro for half a century, contributing to emerging painting styles and mentoring new generations of painters.

In the early 20th century, Cuban artists began to embrace European modernism and the avant-garde artistic movement began to take off, as much of the art from this time period seen in Cuba's museum tours reflects.

During this period, Cuba saw the creation of famous works such as 1938's Los Guajiros- Eduardo Abela's (1889-1965) work idealizing the notion of both the Cuban countryside and the peasant. Works such as Gitana Tropical, created by Victor Manuel (1867-1969) showcase modernism as a theme in Cuban art, with this work being widely renowned as the beginning of the trend. This period also saw the rise to fame of artists such as Amelia Pelaez (1896-1968), Fidelio Ponce de Leon (1895-1949), Carlos Enriquez (1900-1957), and Marcelo Pogolotti (1902-1988).

The art of the 1940's and 50's saw Cuban artists working towards expressing their unique Cuban identities and art became much more individualistic. It was this era that saw the rise of the man who is still largely considered Cuba's most popular and famed painter, Wifredo Lam (1902-1982).

Lam considered the famed artist Pablo Picasso among his closest friends and was introduced to the style of art known as surrealism from Andre Breton. For his own style, Lam seamlessly blended African masks, surrealism, and synthetic Cubism to create a unique but quintessentially Cuban vision.

Another famed artist of this time period is Rene Portocarrero (1911-1985), whose colorful paintings make use of imagery with a Cuban baroque theme. Mariano Rodriguez also belongs to this generation, and his early Gallos series, produced during the 1940's showcases the influences of popular Mexican muralists of the time.

The Cuban Revolution helped promote visual arts throughout Cuba. As a result, the premiere National Arts School was established in 1962. 1976 saw the founding of the Higher Institute of Art, while 1984 saw the establishment of the famous Havana Art Biennial.

Pop art also made its way to the island in the 1960's, with Raul Martinez (1927-1995) gaining fame for his colorful portraits of Cuban leaders and political figures like Che Guevara, and Jose Marti.

The 1970's gave birth to the works of a few famous artists, including Manuel Mendive (b. 1944), Flavio Garcíandia (b.1954), Nelson Dominguez (b. 1947), and Tomas Sanchez (b. 1948).

In the 1980's, conceptual art started to emerge throughout Cuba, and numerous generations of Cuban artists started to come together. This led to the creation of numerous alternative groups, such as ArteCalle, Hacer, Grupo Provisiona, 4X4, Sano y Sabroso, and Pure.

Strain between the institutional system and many artists created friction near the later part of the decade, however, with many artists either permanently or temporarily making an exodus to places like the United States, Mexico, and Venezuela.

In the 1990's, performance art became a popular means of artistic expression, with names such as Tania Bruguera (b. 1968) and Carlos Garaicoa (b. 1967) becoming a big part of the art scene.

Art from this decade highlights the unique and diverse views of Cubans regarding both The Revolution as well as the impact of the embargo enacted by the United States. Metaphors are commonly used to highlight the isolation of Cuba as well as incipient racism, shortages, and the tragedy surrounding the rafters or balseros.

This period has seen the rise of artists such as Abel Barroso (b. 1971), Alexix Leyva, or Kcho (b. 1970) and Tonel, or Antonio Eligio Fernandez (b. 1958).

Cuban Cuisine

African, Spanish, Indigenous, and many other cultures have roots and influences in Cuban cuisine. The island's national dish, a stew made with pork, beef, or poultry as well as a variety of root vegetables, is known as ajiao. Far from the only famed Cuban dish, other delicacies in Cuba include fried green plantains, lechon (roast pork), moros y cristianos (black beans and rice), roast chicken and tamales, picadillo a la habanera (made with ground beef and tomato sauce), and many others. Light sauces are typically used when cooking Cuban meat dishes, while bay leaves, cumin, oregano, onion, and garlic are primary spices

Cuban Sports

Since the Revolution the Cuban government has invested heavily in the promotion of sports in the country. In 1961, just two years after the triumph of the Revolution, the National Institute of Sport, Physical Education, and Recreation (INDER) was created. This is the governing branch of all sport and recreation in Cuba. In 1991 Cuba hosted the Pan-American Games. The island placed first in those games with a total of 265 medals.

Baseball is considered to be the national sport, and the sport which most Cubans are passionate about. Even before the Spanish conquest the Taino Indians played a similar game called "bato". The sport was officially introduced to the island in the 1860s by Cubans who studied in the United States and American sailors who ported in the country. The sport quickly spread across the island nation.

The national baseball team of Cuba is easily the best in Latin America and one of the best in the world. Every province in the country has its own baseball team while Havana City has two and the municipality of the Isla de la Juventud has another. This means there are a total of 16 baseball teams in the national baseball league. The sports season begins in early autumn and culminates with national finals in May. The sporting league is similar to the basketball league in the US where the best of the Eastern conference meets the best of the Western conference in the finals which are played as the best of a series of seven games.

Boxing is the sport that Cuba has enjoyed the most success in on the international stage. From 1968 in Mexico City to Beijing 2008, Cubans have participated in nine Olympic tournaments, winning thirty-two gold medals, fifteen silver medals, and eight bronze medals for a total of fifty-five, a number unmatched by any country. Cuba is also the only country that can boast of two three-time Olympic Champions: Teofilo Stevenson (1972, 1976, and 1980) and Felix Savon (1992, 1996, and 2000).

Of the 99,000 athletes in Cuba currently, 19,000 are boxers, including 81 of Olympic competence, even though only 12 make the Olympic team. Because all sports in Cuba are operated on an amateur basis, Cuban boxers do not participate in lucrative professional boxing bouts.

Cuba also has a great history in track and field sports. The first Olympic success in this sport by Cuba came in 1964 in Toyko when Enrique Figuerola won silver the Men's 100 metre sprint. Cuba continued to provide top contributors to this sport in the international arena, with the likes of Alberto Juantorena Danger dominating this sport in Cuba during the 1970's. In addition to setting two new world records, he won gold for Cuba at Montreal in 1976 in the 400m and 800m. In the 1990's, there were three names that came to the forefront of this sport in Cuba. They are, Iván Pedroso, Ana Fidelia Quiroz and Javier Sotomayor.

Basketball, volleyball and soccer are also popular in Cuba.

CUBA GEOGRAPHY

Cuba is divided into 15 provinces and 169 municipalities. The fifteen provinces are: Pinar del Río, Artemisa, Mayabeque, La Habana, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spíritus, Ciego de Avila, Camagüey, Las Tunas, Holguín, Granma, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo.

Cuba lies south of the Straits of Florida just at the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico. The Atlantic Ocean is to the north and the Caribbean Sea to the south. With a land area of 110,860 km², Cuba is the largest, most diverse, and most beautiful island in the West Indies. It is 1250 km long and between 31 and 191 km wide.

Cuba forms part of the Greater Antilles along with Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The crocodile-shaped island is 80 km from Haiti, 140 km from the Bahamas, 145 km from Florida, 210 km from Mexico, and 146 km from Jamaica.

More than 4,000 islands and cays form the Cuban archipelago. The southern coast includes the archipelagos known as Jardines de la Reina and the Canarreos. The northeastern shore is lined by the Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago, and the Colorados Archipelago lies on the north-western coast. The main island's 5746 km of coastline include more than 200 bays and 289 beaches.

The second largest island in Cuba is the Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) in the southwest, with an area of 2200 km².

Geologically at least, Cuba is part of North America; the boundary between the North American and Caribbean plates runs east-west under the Caribbean Sea to the south of the island. Along the plate margin is a deep underwater rift valley, which runs between Cuba and Jamaica. This feature is quite close to the Cuban coast to the south of the Sierra Maestra, with water plunging to 6000 m only a few miles offshore. Earth movements along the plate boundary make the eastern region of Cuba the most earthquake-prone part of the country, with earthquakes in Bayamo in 1551 and Santiago de Cuba in 1932.

Cuba is also being tilted gradually to the north. The northern coastline is gradually emerging from the sea. Old coral reefs have been brought to the surface, and now form much of the coastline, so that much of the northern coast consists of coral limestone cliffs and sandy beaches. By contrast the southern coastline is being gradually submerged, producing a series of wetlands and mangroves running from the Ensenada de Cortés in the west to the Gulf of Guacanayabo in the east, with fewer sandy beaches than the north of the island.

The Zapata Swamp, the largest wetland in Cuba, is also the largest in the Caribbean, and the best preserved to date in the Antilles. The region encompasses blue-water beaches, forests, rivers, lakes, flooded caverns, ponds, and swamp prairies.

Rivers are invariably small, most of them less than 100km long. There are 30 south-flowing and 11 north-flowing. Cuba's longest river is the Río Cauto in the southeast (343 kilometers). It is navigable for less than half its length.

Limestones of various types cover about two-thirds of the island. In most areas, there is a flat or gently rolling landscape. The most common soils, both formed on limestone, are terra rossa, stained bright red by iron oxides, and vertisols, black, fertile, and developing deep cracks during the dry season.

Mountains and hills make up a quarter of the Cuban territory. There are three main mountain areas in the island. In the west, the Cordillera de Guaniguanico is divided into the Sierra de los Organos in the west, with thick deposits of limestone which have developed a distinctive landscape of steep-sided flat-topped mountains called

'mogotes'; and the Sierra del Rosario in the east. In the center of the country is the medium-height Escambray mountains, which reach 1140 meters.

The Sierra Maestra in the east has Cuba's highest mountains, rising to Pico Turquino (1974 meters) and a different geological history, with some rocks formed in an arc of volcanic activity around 50 million years ago. The country's most important mineral deposits are in this area; nickel mined near Moa is the third largest foreign currency earner, after tourism and sugar.

CUBA'S CLIMATE

Cuba's climate is tropical and moderated by trade winds. The dry season lasts from November to April and the rainy season from May to October.

The average annual temperature is about 77 degrees Fahrenheit or 25 degrees Celsius.

The warm temperatures of the Caribbean Sea and the fact that Cuba sits across the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico combine to make the country prone to frequent hurricanes. The hurricane season normally runs from June to November.