

READING & RETREATING



WISH YOU WERE THERE / HAVANA

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES Until you can stroll Old Havana in person, films, books and music can help satiate the wanderlust.

The Drink

CUBA LIBRE



Mixology is still in its infancy in Havana, but the city has given us a trio of rum cocktails that have become international staples, including the daiquiri and the mojito (white rum muddled with fresh lime chunks and sugar). But the most storied snifter is the Cuba Libre, a politically charged mix of rum and Coca-Cola with a twist of lime. As per legend, it was first poured after the 1898 Spanish-American War, when a Havana bartender decided to amuse U.S. soldier customers by mixing the classic Cuban spirit with the Yanqui soft drink. When he toasted them with the traditional independence cry of "¡Cuba Libre!" ("Free Cuba!"), the soldiers latched on to it as the drink's name.

A favorite Havana spot to sip a Cuba Libre is the Kempinski hotel's rooftop, with views of the harbor glittering below. The U.S. trade embargo banning the import of Cuban rum has thwarted Americans hoping to concoct a textbook-proper version at home. "You could make it with Bacardi, but that would be like sleeping with the enemy," jokes Collin Laverty, a Havana-based expert on U.S.-Cuban relations, referring to the liquor brand's decadeslong trademark war with Havana Club that began when Bacardi, the original producer, was forced to abandon the island. While Mr. Laverty concedes that "any white rum will do, so long as it is not supercheap," until the embargo ends, he recommends the boutique Venezuelan brand Santa Teresa ("great rum, great social project attached to it"). Save mature, dark rums for sipping, he adds, either straight or with a cube or two of ice.

Tropical Infusion

Cuba's capital is just as seductive from afar as it is up close. A few insiders suggest ways to get your fix

By TONY PERROTTET

MANY AMERICAN TRAVELERS find pop culture's romantic image of Havana so vivid they feel they know the city long before arriving. Watching the waves crash across the Malecón, a seafront boulevard; driving a canary-yellow 1950s Chevy convertible; sipping an iced daiquiri in a bar where Hemingway once brawled—all seem like memories you might have inherited intact from grandparents' faded postcards. Pre-pandemic visitors were often

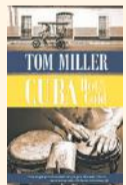
jarred by aspects of the reality: the city's decrepit back streets and the grim Soviet-era structures. But Havana has always rewarded anyone with a sense of adventure, revealing itself as far more complex than the fantasy. Turn a random corner and you might be stopped dead by a streetscape of delirious beauty, its exuberant foliage framed by blue ocean.

The difficulties U.S. visitors have faced trying to visit the island over the last six decades have added a poignancy to the isolation brought on by the pandemic—international flights to Cuba all but

halted again in February. Covid-19 has cruelly recreated the travel ban that began in the early 1960s and only eased in 2015. But the wheel of history will hopefully turn again in late 2021: Cuba, which has invested heavily in biotech for over three decades, is developing vaccines and President Biden has indicated that he will ease travel restrictions the previous administration reimposed. Meanwhile, we can dream. These books, films, meals and songs recommended by renowned Habaneros and in-the-know Cuba experts will transport you across the Florida Straits.

The Read

JON LEE ANDERSON, AUTHOR OF 'CHE: A REVOLUTIONARY LIFE,' OFFERS FOUR OTHER BOOKS THAT REVEAL A HAVANA BEYOND THE CLICHÉS



'Cuba, Hot and Cold' by Tom Miller | "If you had to pick one great introduction to Havana, it'd be this slender, readable work. It hits all the touchstones of history, art and literature with a healthy sense of humor—and you can finish it in an hour and a half."



'Everyone Leaves' by Wendy Guerra | "This novel is about a Cuban girl growing up against the backdrop of Fidel's fading communist dream. At its core, it's about orphanhood, both emotional and psychological, on an island in which there is room for only one father figure."



'Dirty Havana Trilogy' by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez | "In this collection, the 'tropical Bukowski' wanders Havana during the economic crisis of the 1990s, using sex as a form of protest against the revolution. For all its vulgarity, he's a damn fine writer."



'Castro's Cuba' by Lee Lockwood | "Anyone who goes to Havana comes up against the image of Fidel. This handsome coffee-table book is filled with wonderful photos and insider knowledge of Castro during the first years of the revolution, when Lockwood got very close to him."

The Music RAFA ESCALONA, EDITOR OF THE HAVANA MUSIC MAGAZINE AM: PM, RECOMMENDS HIS FAVORITE ARTISTS AND THE SONGS TO DOWNLOAD



Chucho Valdés

Mambo Influenciado (1978)

"Valdés is an essential doorway into Cuban jazz, showing the true complexity of the music and the essential connection between an artist and his instrument; this track is only one of dozens of fabulous hits over a five-decade career."



Daymé Arocena

La Rumba Me Llamo Yo (2017)

"A hit from her album 'Cubafonia,' which is a statement about life as a black Cuban woman: Wearing the white dress and turban of Santería priestesses, she connects to the great jazz divas of the 1950s but is also entirely contemporary."



Cimafunk

Me Voy (2017)

"Although his career is only just taking off, Cimafunk [real name Erik Iglesias Rodríguez, dubbed "the Cuban James Brown"] is a hypnotic performer. The track 'Me Voy' exploded on the streets and has become a sort of Cuban anthem."



Roasted suckling Pig at Havana's Ivan Chef Justo restaurant.

The Meal CUBAN FARE ISN'T ALL RICE AND BEANS. ENRIQUE NUÑEZ, OWNER OF LA GUARIDA RESTAURANT, RECOMMENDS HIS FAVORITES

POPULAR PICK

Ropa Vieja

"This shredded beef dish (literally 'old clothes'), slow-cooked with tomato and garlic, is beloved all over Cuba, but it's more interesting mixed up with new ingredients—we prepare it with garbanzo beans."

UPDATED CLASSIC

Confit of Roast Suckling Pig

"For this dish, the suckling pig is slow-

roasted for several days to be as tender as possible, then the meat is pressed into squares and served with a sauce of honey and orange."

AN OLD FLAME

Fish Caimanero-style

"I found this recipe in Caimanera, a remote eastern town named after Cuban crocodiles. You take a fillet of white fish, grouper or red snapper, grill it in butter, onions and

garlic, then flambé it in white wine."

CUBAN NOUVELLE

Marlin tacos with sweet potato

"Small chunks of freshly caught marlin are marinated for 24 hours in Cuban rum, soy sauce, bay leaves, onions and pepper, then sautéed and wrapped in handmade 'taco' shells made of sweet potato. You won't find these in Mexico."

On Screen FOUR FILMS WHERE THE CITY STEALS THE SCENE



Héctor Medina in the 2017 film 'Viva.'

'Our Man in Havana' (1959) | This awkward adaptation of a comic Graham Greene spy novel is well worth watching to see the Havana street scenes shot literally months after Fidel Castro seized power in 1959. The most alluring aspect is that so much of the city looks entirely the same today. *Streaming on multiple platforms.*



Alec Guinness in 'Our Man in Havana'

'I am Cuba' (1964) | This Russian-Cuban co-production was conceived as a propaganda film but gained cult status as a cinematic masterpiece for its breathtaking images of Havana and superb music. The most memorable scenes are recreations of the mafia-run nightclubs and a party on the Hotel Capri rooftop in the 1950s, which look like tremendous fun. *Available on*

rare DVDs or selections on YouTube.

'Memories of Underdevelopment' (1968) | This surprisingly nuanced classic follows a middle-class writer, Sergio, who stays in Havana when his family leaves after the revolution. He wanders the city in an erotic reverie. The finest scene for armchair travelers is shot inside Hemingway's mansion, La Finca de Vigía, filled with stuffed African animal heads. (Most visitors are only allowed to peer through windows). *Streaming on Criterion Collection*



Luz Maria Collazo, on the right, in 'I am Cuba.'

'Viva' (2015) | In this sweet-natured film revolving around Havana's drag-performance subculture, a nightclub makeup artist named Jesús is visited by his long-lost father, a machista boxer. The depiction of the tropical decay in which most Habaneros live is loving; as one character says, it's "the most beautiful slum in the world." *Streaming on Magnolia Selects*