

Cuba

Tuesday, February 4, 2025



WelcometoCuba



Grand Aston la Habana hotel



Havana

Luis and his 1948 Plymouth taxi in

We arrived at the hotel Grand Aston la Habana and met with our guides, Julie and Ilen. They gave us an orientation lecture to help us get around the hotel and hints about what to expect on our trip. Then we were then taken to dinner at Al Carbón. On the way, Ilen told us the story about how the local independent restaurants came to be called paladars. They were called that because a character in a popular Cuban soap opera named his restaurant Paladar.

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

We visited a workshop called project Ciclo Ecopapel that creates paper products from recycled paper. We were introduced to the family that created the business started by the father.





Then we walked past the famous Floridita bar (Hemingway's favorite in Havana) to [Antojos](#), where we were served lunch on the sidewalk outside of the paladar.



[Plaza de la Catedral](#)



We walked to this plaza and saw a building with a mural painted on it.

We also went to some shops nearby to see art and jewelry exhibits. We returned to the hotel and went to [Casa Mia](#), near the



hotel, for drinks and appetizers before retiring.



Thursday, February 6, 2025

We began the day with a fascinating lecture from Alberto Faya about [Transculturation](#), which describes the process of blending cultures.

Next, we went to [Elizalde](#) to learn about how a paladar is run. We were divided into groups to learn techniques for buying, cooking, and serving food, as well as making drinks. The morning was fun and we were served a great lunch after our “lessons,” including music.



After lunch, we explored the [Central plaza](#) and saw the Capitol building with its golden dome. Of course, we saw lots of cars. Many 1950s model Chevys

and a few collectible models.



Next Monday we will visit an auto shop named Nostalgicars to see where some of

these cars are being remodeled and restored. This is a large occupation in Cuba and there are many independent businesses involved.

We proceeded to our next visit to [Habana Compás](#) to watch a dance rehearsal. It was a lively mix of dance and drumming performed by a troupe of young women in training (see pictures on the next page). It was an amazing performance followed by a visit to

their gift shop. Afterwards, we boarded the bus for the trip back to the hotel. Later we went to dinner at [Decamerón](#).



Friday, February 7, 2025

This morning we boarded our bus for a long Westerly ride to [Viñales](#). We made the first stop at [Finca Vigía](#), a museum to Ernest Hemingway. His fishing boat (named PILAR) is



on display there. Then we continued to the next stop at [Cojímar](#) where we met Georgie, a local fisherman, who also introduced us to El Machito (as he is called). El Machito is ninety-four years old and met Hemingway

as a young boy when he fished in Cojímar. As we walked toward the [Torreón de Cojímar](#), Georgie told us about his life in Cuba and the



travails of being a fisher there. Then we went to [Ajiaco](#) for a fabulous Cuban lunch. After lunch we continued the journey and made a rest stop at



[Pinar del Río](#) where there was a gift shop, a bar, and a nice 1952 Chevy. Next, we arrived at a scenic outlook just outside of Viñales and stopped for picture taking.





When we arrived in Viñales, we were assigned to our casita, Lourdes. Unfortunately, there was a power outage which was already four days old. There were generators in use, so we did have some power, and even Wi-Fi most of the time. Anyway, we gathered outside of our casitas, one the “main road” and proceeded to 3Js ([Tres Jotas](#)) for dinner. We were given a choice of entrees and we chose lamb. The part was huge, consisting of about half of the



lamb. Along with the appetizers and side dishes, it was too much to eat.



However, we were served lots of rum drinks and all had a wonderful time. We walked back to our casitas in the dark (still no power) and prepared for our next adventure

in the Valle del Silencio. Toilets were generally available, without seats, and often, without paper.

Saturday, February 8, 2025

The bus driver, Sulnius, took us to Valle del Silencio ([Valle de Viñales](#)) and a tobacco farm owned by Umberto. We were taken by horse carts to see the fields and drying barns used for their tobacco production. See pictures on the next page:



Umberto even helped Sue smoke her first cigar. She claims that she will only smoke

Cuban from now on. Of course, I had to try it, too. Notice the correct hold of the cigar.

We left for Finca la Cueva to have lunch. It was a place near our next stop at the [Cuevo del Indio](#) where we floated through the cave in a small boat.



We returned to Viñales where we were able to walk around the town and visit the local market. We decided that, after the large meal we had for lunch, we would visit 3Js again to have drinks and tapas.

Sunday, February 9, 2025

After another lovely breakfast on the rooftop at Casa Lourdes with Kanda, who stayed in the other casita on the property, we packed the bus and began our return to Havana. On the way back, We stopped at the [Mural de la Prehistoria](#)



to see this marvel.

Our next stop was at the [Casa Calidad Botanical Gardens](#) near Viñales followed by lunch at [Finca de](#)

Agroecologico. One final stop in Pinar del Río at the “Love and Hope” project. Since this was a long travel day and our guides were unsure if we could arrange for a reservation in Havana, we had dinner at the hotel when we arrived.

Monday, February 10, 2025

We were met outside the hotel, on the Malecón, by a fleet of antique cars.



They will take us to Nostalgicars, the mechanic shop where most of these cars were built. Our group traveled together in the traffic on the way, taking pictures.



When we arrived at Nostalgicars, we were met by the owner's daughter, who opened the gate to the property in the Santos Suárez neighborhood of Havana. Our drivers took us inside and parked their cars in open carports. We were invited to sit for a talk about the shop and how her grandfather had started and how her father had expanded their business.



We were taken into the part of the shop where work was being done on some newly arrived cars. There was a 1959 Chevy and a 1952 Chevy convertible.

Both were in rough shape, but I'm sure they will be beautiful someday. After a stroll through their small gift shop, we got back into the



antique cars which drove us



back to [Habana Vieja](#) to explore the beautiful plaza there.

Julie gave us some recommendations for where to have lunch.

When she mentioned [Paladar Los Mercaderes](#), we

decided to try it because I had already read about what a

good restaurant it is. It was a short walk there and we were

the only ones that tried it. It was worth every extra step. We

were seated outside on the balcony overlooking the alleyway below and

enjoyed a great lunch. After lunch we explored the plaza in Old Havana.



Tomorrow we depart for home.

¡Adios Cuba!

