



MEJDI TOURS

A Taste of Cuba: History, Culture, and Religion

10 days / 9 nights (Fri-Sun)

September 9-18, 2016

Day 1: Friday, September 9: Arrival

- Arrive in Havana early in the day. Check into your hotel and then head out for free time where you can take a walking tour of old Havana . People will fall in love with its museums, forts, theatres, and rum. Be sure to grab some ice cream from the famous Coppelia - a flying saucer shaped ice cream parlor that seats 1,000.
- Have dinner at a local paladar, a restaurant run by citizens (typically a family), rather than the state. You will dine at Paladar “La Moraleja” where a local guide will give you a brief presentation on the history of Cuba, their relationship with the U.S., and the way that the recent US to Cuba travel boom is impacting the local communities.
- End the first day of your trip with a bang by watching the cannon blast ceremony. A local tradition that recalls the history of the 18th century Fort Aleza de San Carlos de la Caban, one of the most famous sights in Cuba. The fort was built by Spanish King Carlos III in order to repel future invaders. Actors in 18th century military regalia re-enact the cannon fire over the harbor, a sight not to be missed.

Hotel: Havana [D]

Day 2: Saturday, September 10: Sun, Sand, and Literature

- Spend your first full day in Cuba by spending some time near the water. You may choose between two options in the morning:
 - 1) learning about local marine life by a local expert while participating in kayaking, scuba diving, or snorkeling. Have lunch at a beach side cafe.
 - 2) trip to visit San Francisco de Paula where you can see Finca Vigia, “lookout house,” once home to Ernest Hemingway between the 1930s to 1960s. Have lunch in Cojimar – the local fishing village that was the inspiration for Hemmingway’s *Old Man in the Sea*.
- Meet the rest of the group back at the beach and the rest of your afternoon is free.
- Travel back to your hotel that evening for dinner in Havana.

Hotel: Havana [B, D]

Day 3: Sunday, September 11: Faith & Art

- Start your morning worshipping with local Christians at a Protestant Church in Havana. Afterwards, have lunch with members of the congregation and learn about their community.
- Spend your afternoon browsing the Centro Cultural Antiguos Almacenes de Deposito San Jose – an Open-air handicraft market that sits under the cover of an old shipping warehouse in Desamparados. A hive of free enterprise and haggling – unusual within the socialist context of Cuba. Souvenirs include paintings, *guayabera* shirts, wood work, leather items, jewelry, and a number of other types of Cuban paraphernalia. This site is popular for both Cubans and visiting tourists.
- Enjoy dinner at Hotel Raquel at their “Garden of Eden” The interior of the Hotel reveals references to Jewish culture, along with Paintings with biblical themes from Cuban artists.

Hotel: Havana [B, L, D]

Day 4: Monday, September 12: Cienfuegos

- Check out of your hotel and depart early for Matanzas where you will drop your bags off at the hotel and continue on to Cienfuegos. Visit the Cienfuegos Botanical Gardens and have lunch with members of the small Jewish community in Cienfuegos at Paladar “Sol Ananda.” After lunch, enjoy an in-depth discussion of Jewish life in Cuba. Learn more about the city on a walking tour of Cienfuegos with City Historian where you will see things such as beautifully preserved centuries-old buildings in the town center or the Jagua Castle. Enjoy a performance by the Cienfuegos Choir and then return to your hotel in Matanzas for dinner.

Hotel: Matanzas [B, L, D]

Day 5: Tuesday, September 13: Matanzas History and Library

- Visit the historic city of Matanzas accompanied by an expert from the City Historian's Office. Your tour of the city will include Ediciones Vigia - a unique book publisher where you will be able to browse through hand-made books and Farmacia Colonial historical chronology of Colonial times. That afternoon, visit The Theological Seminary of Matanzas, the only ecumenical theological institution in Cuba. Learn about the work the students and faculty are doing in their community and what the needs are for the church in Cuba. Enjoy dinner and one of the best views in the city at Restaurante Monserrate

Hotel: Matanzas [B, L, D]

Day 6: Wednesday, September 14: From the Slave Trade to Civil rights

- Begin your day exploring the Museum of the Route of the Slave. The museum is housed in the Castle of San Severino, an 18th-century Spanish military fort. Have lunch, check out of your hotel, and head back to Havana where you will visit the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center at the Baptist Church in Marianao. Join an activity at the MLK center such as a discussion on the issues of Cuban Human Rights with the Baptist pastor, Rev. Raul Suarez who will talk to you about how Cuba is part of the Kingdom of God.
- Have dinner at Divino Paladar – a Havana restaurant that works in areas of food sustainability and social justice where you can meet with a local leader working on anti-racism and human rights in Cuba.

Hotel: Havana [B, L, D]

Day 7: Thursday, September 15: The Revolution

- Visit the University of Havana and learn about the revolution from historians and other academics. Have lunch with faculty and students to discuss their perspective on the changing U.S.-Cuba relationship. That afternoon, take a walking tour of Old Havana with a city historian with emphasis on buildings and institutions that are significant in the cultural history of Cuba. Stops at the plaza de la revolucion and other important places. Continue the discussion over dinner at Restaurant El Litoral.

Hotel: Havana [B, L, D]

Day 8: Friday, September 16: Afro-Cuban Religions

- Spend your day learning about syncretic Santeria (Way of the Saints), the Afro-Caribbean religion based on the Nigerian Yoruba tribe and an integration of certain Catholic traditions. You'll first visit the Guanabacoa museum where you can learn about Santeria and other syncretic religions, see their artifacts, and explore the city that is the center of this religion. That afternoon, visit the Asociacion Cultural Yoruba de Cuba for the Tambores Santeria for a drum ceremony. Travel back to Havana where your evening is free to have dinner on your own and enjoy the night!

Hotel: Havana [B, L]

Day 9: Saturday, September 17: Classic Cuba

- Begin your morning with a driving tour of Havana and nearby Cuban sights in classic cars – taking in spectacular views from the road of the colorful, historic buildings of Cuba.
- Return to Havana where you will learn alongside locals how to make a traditional Cuban dish such as Ropa Vieja. After you've enjoyed your home made lunch, travel with your group to the Havana Club – where you will learn about the history of Rum and sample rum that has been stored in the same barrels for generations. Learn the connection between Rum and the Revolution.
- Enjoy a farewell dinner at the iconic Hotel Nacional.

Hotel: Havana [B, L, D]

Day 10: Sunday, September 18: Departure

- Have breakfast, check out of your hotel and head to the Havana airport for flights back to the U.S.

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