

My First Trip to Cuba after Five Years

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Departure, Customs, and the Return Journey to Cuba

During my first seven-day trip after five years of living in Miami to Cuba, the most challenging thing was a 13-hour flight and a queue at customs. On the way out, there will be even more; you have to show this yellow leaflet with information about where you stayed in Cuba and still pay 25 cuc (Cuban convertible pesos) to leave the country. And will tempt to say, they say, sorry, but I do not have any money, in any currency – do not let me out of the country, please. After a week's stay in my native city with my family, we decided it was better to fly to Havana on Monday, and we left the doors of Jose Marti International Airport. The heat immediately hugged us like a big Cuban mother, and taxi drivers with offers to take us to the center for 25 cuc flew like flies. If we do not hurry, stand firmly on 15 cuc, but if we are tired and can't bargain, then we will be in the city at 20 cuc quickly. Knowledge of Spanish, at least at the lowest level, is a big plus in your wallet. However, resorting to English, gestures and body language, you can also achieve a result, and sometimes, among the population "50," there are more English speakers than English was taught in universities. And yet, in Spanish, even the most broken and slow is better. (Sharpley, 2009)

So many dreamily say who ever visited Cuba. Cuba is love forever. This is the place where they want to return. Therefore, probably, these notes are not very valuable for experienced travelers. They should rather be perceived as sketches of personal impressions received on this beautiful island. In addition, I managed to visit not all of Cuba but only some places, mainly the western part of it. Much of what I saw, for sure, I understood in my own way, and maybe not at all as it really is. I tried very hard to see and understand everything – how life is arranged in Cuba, what kind of people there are, what kind of nature. The map shows the places where we visited. The trip was organized not by the tour guide but by a group of its people, led by an experienced man, a biologist who worked in Cuba for several years, who took over the organizational issues – renting transport, hotel booking, guides, and participation in the international wildlife photography contest nature. (Sharpley, 2009)

The main theme of our trip was wildlife, but we looked at everything little by little – culture, architecture, and everything that would fall. In total, we were 12 people. My husband and three of our friends flew to Havana two days before the others in time to get used to the new climate and time zone. Direct flight Moscow – Havana took 13 hours. We flew very interestingly, in the afternoon, over the ice of Greenland, Canada, and the United States of America, then flew over Florida and soon landed in Cuba. The palms that I saw right at the airport of Jose Marti made an indelible impression on me. It happens like nothing special but raises enthusiasm. I could not believe that having flown out of winter Moscow, you could get to the tropics right away, where you simply and calmly and brazenly

stick out of the palm tree in something. They are not cold, because even in winter there is no frost.

First Impressions of Havana and Local Transportation

These palm trees are not at the airport. At the airport palms are smaller and generally of a different kind. By arrangement, we were met at the airport by a man who ordered us a taxi. The taxi after the palm trees was probably the second brightest impression. I knew that old American cars were still in Cuba and that they were sort of riding them. But I could not think that among them there are absolutely chic specimens and that there are so many of them. I thought that driving an antique car in Cuba was a separate entertainment that would require some organizational effort. But no, they are just everywhere. Riding an old car is easy; I would say it's harder to find a new one, although it's not. Here is a taxi for us to come. Someone asked me if it is true that it is difficult to rent a car in Cuba. No, the state-owned company is renting a car in Cuba, it's simple, inexpensive, the cars are new and modern, they have special numbers with the letter T, for which it is clear that the car is tourist. (Sharpley, 2009)

We did not take the car but rented a minibus with a driver and guide, and, of course, modern and comfortable. But it was a little later. In Havana, we drove for two days by taxi and walked on foot, and we were happy. For the first two days in Havana, my husband and I stayed at the National de Cuba Hotel. This is a very famous historical place. I wanted to say "pathos," but this is not the word. Paphos was in the 30's when it was built. The hotel was built on the money of the American mafia in 1930. Since its inception, it has not been seriously repaired, and everything there is – watches, decorations, doors, elevators – everything is genuine. Here stayed Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, and Frank Sinatra. In this fountain, in the garden near the National Hotel in the movie "7 días en La Habana," Emir Kusturica threw a mobile phone. In general, this is a famous fountain – films were made near him, and various interesting people were photographed. My husband came to the idea – to organize a competition of short films shot in any genre and with any storyline. The main thing is that there was this fountain.

The trip was spontaneous, so we did not have to choose a hotel; we went to the hotel where we had seats. We rested with the family; on the whole, the impression of rest was on the weak three. The hotel area is quite large, but the overall impression is that it is quite neglected. Tiles at the pools for ten days have never been washed, at least from a hose; on the tracks, old leaves are also not removed. Bleached paint and punctured tiles also have a place to be.

Hotel Life, Daily Conditions, and Encounters with

the City

On arrival, place only after 4 pm; we arrived around 2 pm and waited in the hotel to check into the room. The room as a whole is quite spacious, the plumbing and pillow are really awful, and the towels and bed linen leave much to be desired. Room cleaning daily, the maid's tip is welcomed as if cleaned without tips it's hard to say, but in general, the toilet paper was always clean floors and plumbing. Towels and bed linens are changed, if only throw off the towels on the floor. To change the bed, you need to put a card. We had ten days of laundry that did not change, and even things were gone that were dried on the terrace. At the exit from the block, there was a special basket for dirty dishes, and so dirty dishes there developed, but for ten days, never unloaded. The hotel has several bars, the main restaurant, la Marina, and four restaurants a la carte, the food in general is quite diverse, tasty, just a lot. Liked the breakfasts; great variety; there were yogurts with cereal and pancakes fried and fruit flambé.

Service waiters are pretty decent, there have always been fruits: pineapples, papaya, bananas, watermelon, guava. In the restaurant itself, mold is visible on the walls in some places, but overall, it's pretty good. From the restaurants on the Alya map, most liked Italian, Cuban and Marine work in the evening on the basis of Snake bars, so the furnishing and maintenance is appropriate. In bars and restaurants, sometimes live music, which, of course, is a plus. In general, the rest most liked the ocean, with good weather is pretty clean, the beach is huge and sandy, nothing swims in the water, quite small, just for the sake of the ocean it's worth coming here. Yes, and with the weather we were unlucky, it was cool and rainy.

While there is money and free time, it is worth buying souvenirs. In the city, shops do not do this because they are all pretty "typical," and buying with hands or on small means buying at a high price. Of course, if you have something concrete to the heart and the money is allowed, you have to take it on the spot – or there is a great chance that then you will not find it anywhere. But when it comes to two or three kilograms of magnets, beads, statuettes, maracas, drums, t-shirts, bags and baseballs for relatives, friends, and colleagues – you have a direct road to the souvenir port market, it's the Mercado de Los Subeniros or Almacenes San Jose on Avenida del Puerto – a phrase that is worth talking bisitaksistu.

Art, Tourism, and Reflections on the Cuban Experience

In addition to all of the above, there we can see the pictures of numerous contemporary artists and even buy ourselves a couple for a similar price, as well as plaits, braid half ahead and drink coconut juice with rum, contemplating the ocean. As for prices – read the recommendations above and bargain, mercilessly bargain!

On the last day of the trip, we were in Kayejon de Hamel, an art object the size of a street. This impasse in Central Havana was painted and decorated by the Cuban artist Salvador Gonzalez Escalona. The riot of colors, ambiguous inscriptions, hanging dolls, mocked mannequins and old iron baths diced in half instead of benches – the uninitiated will not immediately guess that all kayejon is nothing more than a tribute to the Afro-Cuban culture and, in particular, its religious component, as a Santeria.

Works Cited

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