



Cultural, Historical and Delightful Cuba
Specially prepared for

BTI GROUP

October 03 – 09, 2016

**This trip will be conducted under a General License –
Humanitarian Project (section 515.575)**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 03 – HAVANA

Board your **XAEL** charter flight #9532 (Operated by Envoy Air) from Miami nonstop to Havana, leaving at 8:00am and arriving Havana Jose Marti Airport at 9:00am. You must be at the charter counter no later than 5:00am. Charter times are subject to change!

After clearing Cuban Customs and Immigration, you will be met by a **Ya'lla Tours USA** Cuban representative and tour guide to begin your amazing visit to Havana. Drive through the once fashionable residential area of **Miramar**, which retains its pre-revolution air of exclusivity. The beautiful houses are now used for embassies, commercial offices, and tourist development. Drive through **Revolution Square**, the administrative and political center of Cuba. Then, arrive at your hotel for check in.

Our hotel, **MELIA COHIBA**, is one of the best 5-star hotels in Havana, overlooking the famed Malecon, 3 miles from Old Havana. All 462 rooms have 2 double beds, air-conditioning, satellite TV, in room movies, internet access, safe deposit box, mini bar and hair dryer. Facilities and services include an outdoor pool, meeting rooms, gift shop, sauna, Jacuzzi, fitness center, beauty salon, 1 buffet restaurant and 4 a la carte restaurants, 4 bars and 24-hour room service.

www.solmelia.com/hotels/cuba/havana/melia-cohiba

A special **welcome dinner** will be held at **Magic Flute Paladar**, it is a penthouse on the 10th floor near the Malecon and across from the US Embassy, offering a taste of jazz with flavored delicacies that would allow you to enjoy a very unique combination of an authentic cuisine prepared by a specialized chef, accompanied by a garniture of Afro-Cuban Jazz as your musical background.

Return to the hotel for overnight.



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 04 – HAVANA

Take a walking tour around the historic center of **Old Havana**, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Visit **Plaza de San Francisco de Asis** and the 16th-century **Convento de San Francisco de Asis**. This is one of the finest buildings from the colonial period. The basilica and the monastery of San Francisco de Asis (Saint Francis of Assisi) were built in Havana at the end of sixteenth century (1580-91) as the home of the Franciscan community, and were altered in the Baroque style in 1730. The church was used for worship by the English during the year they ruled Havana. When it returned to Spanish rule, they chose not to use it as a church. It is now used for concerts.

See **Plaza Vieja**, one of Havana's historic squares dating from the 16th century, and its surrounding art galleries.

Visit **Plaza de la Cathedral**, where the most prominent building is the Cathedral of the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception, seat of Jaime Lucas Ortega y Alamino, the Cardinal Archbishop of Havana, Cuba. The cathedral is dedicated to Saint Christopher (San Cristobal) and is also known as Cathedral of Saint Christopher.

The construction of the cathedral was started by Jesuits in 1748 on the site of an earlier church and finished by Havana City in 1777. The cathedral is set in the former Plaza de La Cienaga or Swamp Plaza. The Cathedral is said to be the only example of a Baroque façade that was designed with asymmetrical features – one of the towers is wider than the other. This particular feature was conceived in order to allow the water that accumulated on the plaza to freely flow. Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier famously described the cathedral as “*music set in stone.*”

Lunch will be served at **Café Oriente** at San Francisco de Asis Square. This is the best government-owned restaurant in Havana.

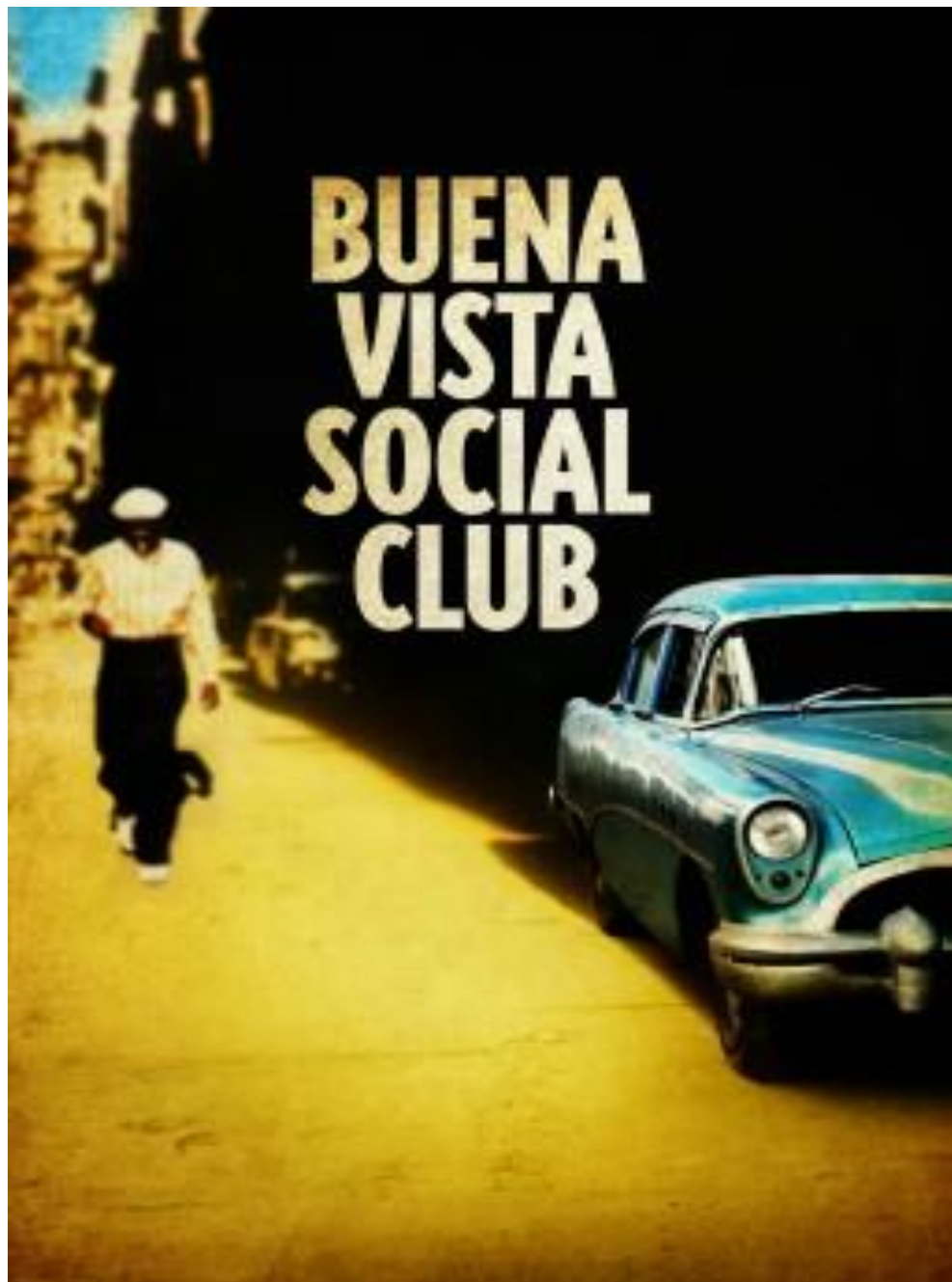
After lunch, visit the famous **El Floridita Bar**, birthplace of the daiquiri and one of Hemingway's favorite Havana bars. In 1953, “Esquire” magazine, called it one of the world's seven best bars. (Drinks not included, \$7 each). Since that time, El Floridita has been frequented by distinguished visitors to Havana, ranging from artists to official guests of the government.

Stop for pictures outside **El Capitolio Nacional** (Capitol building). Built in 1929 as the Senate and House of Representatives, the colossal building is recognizable by its dome, which dominates the city's skyline. Inside stands the third largest indoor statue in the world, La Estatua de la Republica. Today the Capitolio is home to the **Cuban Academy of Sciences** and the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (the National Museum of Natural History), with the largest natural history collection in the country. (The building is currently under renovation and may not allow visitors inside).

Visit the **Centro Hebreo Sephardi de Cuba**. Meet with Dr. Levy, the head of the community, and hear about the congregation, the challenges they face and the programs they offer, and visit their new **Holocaust Remembrance Hall**.

Then, visit the home-gallery of **Damian Aquiles** in a beautifully restored villa in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. Although Damian is best known for his walking man figures cut from scrap metal and arranged in various evocative groupings, he works in a range of styles and mediums.

Our **Dinner** tonight will be at the **Rio Mar**, one of the best privately-run, home restaurants. The dining room is in a terrace on the water with amazing views of the **Miramar** neighborhood. *Transfers to the restaurant will be done in vintage cars.* Then travel to the **Buena Vista Social Club**, where advance VIP seats have been reserved for you. This is Havana's most exciting music show. Return to the hotel for overnight.



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5 – HAVANA

Start the day with a visit to the **Convento de Belen**, a world renowned community center and social services facility, where you will have the opportunity to make contributions.

This unique, ambitious project serves Havana's poorest neighborhoods, with special focus on the elderly and disabled children. The vitality, hope and cooperative spirit of Convento de Belen is truly inspirational and visitors come away deeply touched and eager to support this work.

Continue to visit **Teatro Amadeo Roldan**. Located within a monumental modern building, once home to The Havana Auditorium, the venue now consist of the **Amadeo Roldan** and **Garcia Caturla** halls, offering symphonic orchestras, piano recitals, and a mixture of classical and contemporary music. The theater apart from the being **home of the National Symphony Orchestra** is also home to prestigious international events.

See the **Palacio de los Capitanes Generales at Plaza de Armas**, where the city was originated. Built in 1776, this stately palace remains as a testament to Cuba's importance as Spain's principal port of the Americas during the 18th century.

Continue to **Conde Villanueva Cigar lounge** and earn about the history of the cigar in Cuba and the production process and see a variety of premium Habanos.

Visit the **Havana Club Museum of Rum** and journey back to the origins of Cuba's most famous beverage. From freshly cut stalks of sugar cane to a refurbished distillery and ageing cellars, the museum offers a real-time experience of the rum-making process, as well as a taste of true Cuban culture. An upstairs gallery features an authentic mule-driven cane mill used in the earliest ingenious (sugar refineries). A historically accurate model of a steam locomotive reminds us that Cuba was the first country in Latin America to use a railway for the transport of sugar cane. The next door leads to a much larger model, the achievement of a master Cuban craftsman. This masterpiece captures the essence of the great sugar refineries and rum distilleries, whose immense chimneys rise as landmarks over the Cuban countryside. At the end of the visit you will have a tasting of the famous Cuban rum.

Lunch will be served at the seafood restaurant **El Litoral** in the Malecon.

Visit the **Museum of Fine Arts**, where one of the museum's most senior curators will guide you through exhibits of some of the most interesting Cuban art in the country, as well as works from outside Cuba.

End the visit to Old Havana at the outdoor **handicraft market**.

Dinner tonight is on your own, ask your **Ya'lla Tours** guide to recommend a Paladar (a private home that hosts foreigners for dinner) or restaurant.

This evening's treat is a classical music concert by the **National Symphonic Orchestra**. The national symphony orchestra held its first public performance with a concert in the **Teatro Auditorium de La Habana** in 1960, nowadays called: the **Teatro Amadeo Roldan**. Among national performances in Cuba and in countries such as: Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Spain, Peru, Argentina, Martinique and Guadeloupe. The orchestra also takes part in record productions and events that take place in Cuba, such as the international festivals of Guitar, the festival of Contemporary Music, the one of the New Latin-American Cinema, and the international Festival of Havana Ballet.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 06- HAVANA

Start the morning at the **Guarderia Padre Usera**, a day care for children ages 2 to 5 years old, mostly of single mothers, many teenagers. The center is open 7:00am to 4:30pm, allowing the mothers to work to support their families. The center is run by the office of the Cardinal of Havana but has complete pedagogic autonomy and aims to prepare the children for a healthy and productive life. In our visit we will meet Sister Theresa, who runs the place, and see the teachers and the kids. This will be a perfect place to leave some of the donations you have brought for children.

Visit the **NSA (National School of Art)**. The school was founded in 196 by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara on the grounds of the former Havana Country Club. The architecture of the school's structures is unique and considered among the most important architectural achievements of the Cuban Revolution. Visit the **School of Music**.

Have lunch at the **Templete Restaurant** by the Havana Port.

Enjoy a performance by **La Camerata Romeu**. The Camerata Romeu was founded in 1993, as the first female string orchestra in Latin America and in the world only because of their gender, repertoire and stage presence. Cuba's best composers, Latin America's and North America's have written works that have been recorded in several phonograms by this orchestra. With this chamber orchestra, **Zenaida Romeu** has made numerous international tours (Spain, Sweden Norway, Belgium, France, the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Costa Rica, Colombia, etc.) and numerous recordings of Cuban and Latin American music for a Latin-American, Cuban and female orchestra, often unpublished, collected in the phonograms La Bella Cubana.

Return to the hotel for overnight.

Dinner tonight is on your own. Ask your **Ya'lla Tours** guide to recommend a **Paladar**.



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 07 – HAVANA

Drive to the EGREM Studios (Empresa de Grabaciones y Ediciones Musicales, Spanish for *Enterprise of Recordings and Musical Editions*) to have an interchange of experiences and a casual interview with the staff of Cuba's most important recording studio. EGREM is the national record label of Cuba. It is headquartered in Old Havana, where its main record studios and sublabel (Areito) operate. It was founded in 1964 after the nationalization of the Cuban music industry, absorbing the assets of Panart. EGREM had a monopoly on music production activities from 1964 until the late 1980s when independent labels reemerged.

Drive to **Cojimar**, a fishing village 7 miles southeast of the center of Havana, which inspired the Ernest Hemingway novel *The Old Man and the Sea* (the 1954 Nobel Prize winner).

Lunch will be at **Ajiaco Paladar**, a newly opened, private restaurant with a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. **Chef Raidel de los Rios** and his team are masterful. Together with the chef, you will prepare a gourmet Cuban meal and then enjoy your beautiful and delicious creation.

Then, continue in the footsteps of **Ernest Hemingway**. One of Havana's best-kept treasures is its close relationship with writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), known affectionately as Papa. The lovely **Finca Vigia** was Hemingway's home in Cuba for two decades. He bought the house in 1939 and it was opened as a museum in 1964. It contains more than 22,000 original items that belonged to Hemingway, including records, books, paintings, personal documents, photographs, and hunting weapons. Peering inside the house through large windows and strolling around the peaceful grounds, visitors get a good feel for the daily life of the great writer.

Return to Havana and the entrance of **Havana Bay**. Some 300 meters from the **Three Morro Kings Castle** is the largest fortress in the Americas: **San Carlos de la Cabana**, built between 1763 and 1774 under the command of Spanish military engineer Don Silvestre Abarca. **Carlos III, King of Spain** at the time, requested a spyglass and exclaimed "*The Cabana, such a valuable work, should be spotted from Madrid*". The fortress was used as a military base and a prison for more than two hundred years and Che Guevara made it his headquarters for some months during the Cuban revolution. Today it holds the most important ancient weapon collection of the country.

Late in the afternoon, drive to Estadio Latinoamericano for a baseball game.

Dinner tonight is on your own: ask your **Ya'lla Tours** guide to recommend a **Paladar**.

Return to the hotel for overnight.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 08 – HAVANA

After an early breakfast, set out for a 2.5-hour drive to **Pinar Del Rio**, Cuba's western-most province and primary tobacco growing region. Pass through the beautiful countryside of the Guaniguanico mountain range, agricultural lands, and pine forests.

Visit a local farm, **Hector Luis** tobacco farm. Known as Habano-Man, Hector Luis is a "vegüero" (tobacco grower). He was the youngest man in the world to receive the Habano award in 2008 and in 2009. A lovely "Ranchon" with a stocked bar has been built which can accommodate a good number of people. He's all setup to receive large groups of cigar aficionados who take tours along the Tobacco Route in the Pinar de Rio region of Cuba.

Next, visit the **Vinales Valley**, with some of the most spectacular scenery in all of Cuba. Conical limestone hills rise above the fertile valley floor, where small, privately-owned farms dot the landscape. Centuries of erosion has created many underground rivers and caves. See the mural depicting the evolution of this region.

Later in the afternoon, visit the **Cueva Del Indio** (Indian Cave) and its subterranean river. Take a short boat-ride in the cave.

Return to Havana for overnight.

Dinner tonight is on your own, ask your **Ya'lla Tours** guide to recommend a **Paladar**.



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 09 – HAVANA

You will be transferred to **Havana's Jose Marti Airport** to board your **XAEL** charter flight #427 (Operated by World Atlantic) to Miami, leaving at 12:15pm and arriving at 1:30pm. Charter times may change!

