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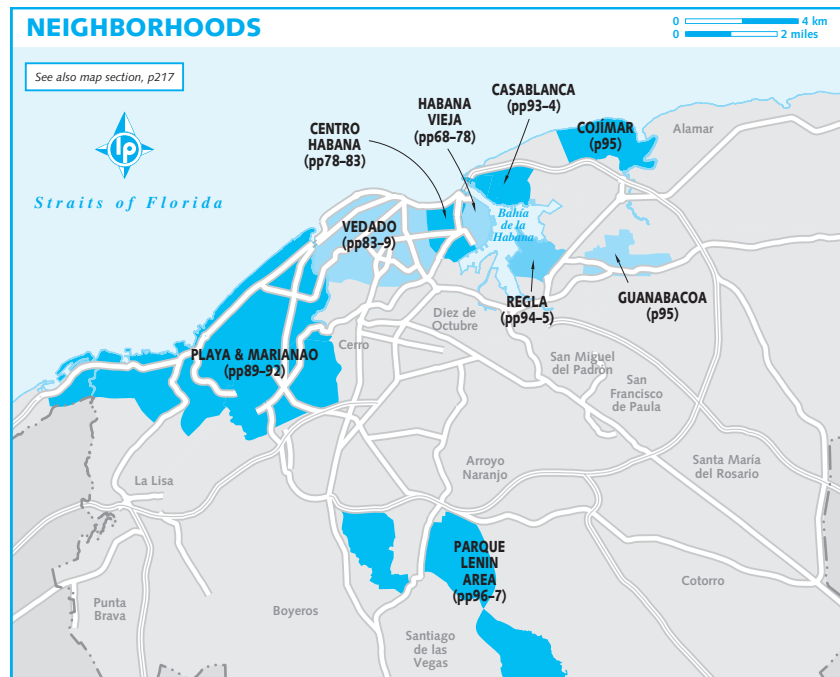
Sights

Central Habana consists of three main neighborhoods. The most interesting for visitors is Habana Vieja, a magnificent Unesco World Heritage site that juxtaposes fascinating museums and gorgeous architecture with the lives over 70,000 proud *habaneros* (inhabitants of Habana). Habana Vieja is where most of the city's signature sights are located and hence is where most travelers spend the bulk of their time.

Flanking Habana Vieja to the west is Centro Habana, a crowded grid of weathered tenements and transitional 20th-century architecture that is home to the massive Capitolio building, the famous Partagás cigar factory and one of the most romantic stretches of the Malecón (Av de Maceo), Habana's dreamy sea drive. Here you can witness Habana without the tourist-brochure wrapping, a city of beguiling insights and confounding contradictions that is forever fascinating, but not always pretty.

Along Centro Habana's western border lies the central district's third main neighborhood, Vedado, a leafy suburb that was taken over by the American Mafia in the 1940s and '50s, when US mobsters such as Meyer Lansky attempted to turn Cuba's colonial capital into a Caribbean version of Las Vegas. Posing today as a fashionable, if slightly faded, commercial district, Vedado boasts a university, some choice nightspots and a handful of interesting museums. Though quieter and more spread out than bustling Habana Vieja, Vedado is no less alluring, with picturesque parks and imposing American-era apartment blocks.

West of the Río Almendares, central Habana folds gently into the garden suburbs of Playa and Marianao. Here, elegant eclectic mansions rub shoulders with thick-trunked fig trees amid the wide boulevards and rocky shorelines of Habana's ubertrendy diplomatic



district. Once a bastion of rich American businessmen, Playa has been recolonized in recent years by foreign embassies and fancy hotels and, although tourist sights might be a little thin on the ground, the neighborhood is not bereft of its own salubrious charms.

Other areas of Habana of interest to travelers include the eastern neighborhoods of Regla, Guanabacoa, Cojimar and Casablanca, plus the outlying suburbs of Parque Lenin, Santiago de las Vegas, San Francisco de Paula and Santa María del Rosario.

For information about transportation within Habana, see p184.

ITINERARIES

One Day

Fortify yourself with an early morning coffee in the elegant **Café de las Infusiones** (p111), with its hissing espresso machines and talented resident pianist.

The **Museo de la Revolución** (p81) will take up most of the morning, but you can clear your head afterwards with a revitalizing stroll through Habana Vieja, taking in the four 16th-century plazas. Grab a snack lunch alfresco in the gorgeous **Restaurante El Patio** (p114) before hailing a yellow coco-taxi (distinctive egg-shaped taxi) to whiz you over to the quirky **Callejón de Hamel** (p139) in Centro Habana.

After digesting a raw and hypnotic dose of Afro-Cuban rumba, stroll over to Vedado, where you can break up a leisurely afternoon with an ice cream at the **Coppelia** (p119) or a mojito in the **Hotel Nacional** (p85). After a pleasant sunset stroll back along the **Malecón** (p86), taxi it to **Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña** (p93) for the 9pm *cañonazo* (shooting of the cannons) and get back to Habana Vieja in time for a late dinner at the **Restaurante La Dominica** (p115).

Three Days

Follow the one-day itinerary, then split day two between the **Plaza de la Revolución** (p87) and the **Real Fábrica de Tabacos Partagás** (p83). In the evening, buy a copy of *Cartelera* to check out the nighttime activities at **El Hurón Azul** (p137) or the **Casa de la Música Centro Habana** (p137) before hitting the **Miramar paladar** (privately run restaurant; p124) scene for a wonderfully delicious dinner.

On day three, spend the morning examining the monuments, graves and religious iconology in the **Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón** (p106) before whetting your appetite with a light lunch at the nearby **Café Fresa y Chocolate** (p133). The afternoon can be spent soaking up the free musical entertainment in Calle Obispo or wandering around the **secondhand book market** (p152) in Plaza de Armas. Make a reservation at the **Paladar Guarida** (p118) for dinner and round the evening off with a glamorous nighttime cabaret show at the glitzy **Copa Room** (p136) in the Hotel Riviera.

HABANA STREET NAMES

Confusingly, many main avenues around Habana have two names in everyday use – a new name that appears on street signs and in this book, and an old name overwhelmingly preferred by locals. See below to sort it all out.

Old name	New name
Zulueta	Agramonte
Someruelos	Aponte
Av del Puerto	Av Carlos Manuel de Céspedes
Egido & Monserrate	Av de Bélgica
Vives	Av de España
Galiano	Av de Italia
Av de Rancho Boyeros	Av de la Independencia
Monserrate	Av de las Misiones
Cristina	Av de México
Carlos III (Tercera)	Av Salvador Allende
Reina	Av Simón Bolívar
Teniente Rey	Brasil
La Rampa	Calle 23
Av de los Presidentes	Calle G
Cárcel	Capdevila
Estrella	Enrique Barnet
Paula	Leonor Pérez
Av de Maceo	Malecón
Monte	Máximo Gómez
Belascoáin	Padre Varela
Paseo del Prado	Paseo de Martí
San José	San Martín

HABANA FOR CHILDREN

Bring your kids to Habana and you'll quickly discover that they'll be more of a help than a hindrance. Cubans love children and bringing a small family along with you will open up many doors that otherwise would have remained closed. Kid-friendly sights include the following:

- Acuario Nacional (p90)
- Aquarium (p68)
- Cinecito (p142)
- Circo Tropoloco (p142)
- Coppelia (p119)
- Parque Lenin (p96)
- Parque Almendares (p87)
- Teatro Nacional de Guíñol (p133)

Other kid-specific parks include **Holá Ola** (Map pp224-5; Malecón btwn Principe & Vapor; ☀ 11am-sunset), which has minigolf for CUC\$2, and **Parque La Maestranza** (Map p220; Av Carlos Manuel de Céspedes; admission CUC\$2; ☀ 9am-5pm), which is open to under-fours only.

At the time of writing, there was also a huge new amusement park being built in Playa next to Circo Tropoloco.

terminal and board a boat bound for Regla. Disembarking at the dock you'll see the **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Regla** (p94) directly in front of you. After paying your respects to the venerated Virgin of Regla, hike a few blocks up Calle Martí to the **Museo Municipal de Regla** (p94), where you can unlock the secrets of Santería. If you've still got any energy left, press on a kilometer or so to the rarely visited **Colina Lenin** (p94) for stellar views over Habana. Take the ferry back across the harbor to Habana Vieja and finish your day with a home-brew beer in the **Taberna de la Muralla** (p135) or a cup of something sweeter in the **Museo del Chocolate** (p113).

On day seven try to keep your options open. If you've had your fill of culture, organize a trip to the **Marina Hemingway** (p185) for a boat 'seafari' (p144) or a **diving excursion** (p144). For those who just can't get enough of colonial forts and historic museums, make your way over to the **Castillo de los Tres Santos Reyes Magnos del Morro** (p93) or home in on the **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes** (p82). In the evening check out the concert program at the **Gran Teatro de la Habana** (p131) for ballet and opera or, for something a little less formal, hail a taxi to the **Café Cantante Mi Habana** (p140).

ORGANIZED TOURS

Since all of Habana's half-dozen or so tourist agencies are government run, competition between them is minimal and the itineraries they offer are much the same. The main exception to this rule is the San Cristóbal Agencia de Viajes, which is run by the City Historian's Office and offers some of the best packages in the city.

Most of the main hotels have representatives from the Cubatur, Cubanacán,

One Week

Follow the three-day itinerary and on day four hit the road for an out-of-town excursion to **Las Terrazas** (p179), Cuba's model ecovillage. Partake in a short hike to the **Cafetal Buenavista** (p181) or visit the **Peña de Polo Montañez** (p181) down by the lake, but don't forget to sample one of island's best cups of coffee in the friendly **Cafe de María** (p181). Return to Habana in the evening and, if you're still feeling sociable, head for a quick (expensive) daiquirí in the world-famous **El Floridita** (p134) bar.

Stay close to the city center on day five where you might want to consider a specialized tour with Habaguanex travel agency San Cristóbal. Its **architectural** (opposite) and **social programs** (opposite) excursions are highly recommended. Spend the afternoon browsing through the souvenirs at the **Feria de la Artesanía** (p151) before heading over to the **Barrio Chino** (Chinatown; p81) for a cheap and tasty dinner.

Kick off day six with a **dance lesson** (p145) at the **Museo del Ron** (p75), and stick around afterwards to take a peep at the fascinating museum. After a couple of glasses of Havana Club drunk straight up at the museum bar, stroll a block or two south to the ferry

Gaviota and Havanatur agencies. Additionally, a San Cristóbal rep can be found in any of the city's Habaguanex hotels.

City Sights

CUBANACÁN Map pp224-5

☎ 873-2686; www.cubanacan.cu; Hotel Nacional, cnr Calles 0 & 21

The famous *cañonazo* (shooting of the cannons) is held nightly in the Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña, and is one of Habana's

oldest traditions. If you go it alone, you'll pay a CUC\$6 entry fee, plus taxi hire there and back. With Cubanacán's CUC\$15 organized trip, however, you can throw in all of the above plus a side visit to the Castillo de Tres Santos Reyes Magnos del Morro. Cubanacán also has an office at Hotel NH Parque Central (Map p222; Calle Neptuno btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte).

CUBATUR Map pp224-5

☎ 833-3170/1; www.cubatur.cu; Calle 23 btwn Calles L & M

If you're short on time, but keen to see as much of Habana as possible, a guided city tour (CUC\$15) is worth the gamble. Itineraries include a manageable mix of walking and driving, and take in such notable Habana landmarks as the Plaza de la Revolución, the Capitolio, the Malecón and Habana Vieja's four main colonial squares.

GAVIOTA Map pp228-9

☎ 204-4411; Hotel Kohly, cnr Av 49 & Calle 36 Habana's Jardín Botánico Nacional (National Botanical Garden), situated 20km south of the city, is notoriously inaccessible by public transportation, and Gaviota's organized trip is the easiest way to get there. The standard package (CUC\$19) includes transportation to the gardens, entry fee, a guided tour, and a free cocktail when you arrive. The gardens themselves are surprisingly interesting and varied.

Cultural Tours

HAVANATUR Map pp228-9

☎ 203-9770, 830-8227; www.havanatur.cu; Edificio Sierra Maestra, Av 1 btwn Calles 0 & 2

All of Habana's main travel agencies offer a Hemingway tour, and the packages are much the same. The itinerary (CUC\$20) includes a visit to the author's house La Finca Vigía, a side trip to the fishing village of Cojímar (where Papa moored his boat), plus

TOP FIVE MUSEUMS

- Museo de la Revolución (p81)
- Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (p82)
- Museo de la Ciudad (p74)
- Fundación Naturaleza y El Hombre (p90)
- Museo del Ron (p75)

an opportunity to down copious mojitos and daiquirís in Hemingway's two favorite watering holes, the overhyped Bodeguita del Medio and El Floridita.

SAN CRISTÓBAL AGENCIA

DE VIAJES Map p220

☎ 861-9171/2; www.viajessancristobal.cu; Oficinos No 110 btwn Lamparilla & Armagura

The city historian's travel agency runs a number of cultural tours, including an illuminating architectural tour (CUC\$19) that is quite possibly the best specialized trip Habana has to offer. The three- to four-hour jaunt around the city's famous and not-so-famous architectural sites takes in a riot of art deco, art nouveau and eclectic architecture, and concludes with a walking tour through the beautiful baroque squares of Habana Vieja. The guides on this excursion are superb and their knowledge of the city's history and architecture is encyclopedic.

The agency also runs a tour that provides a rundown of religion in Cuba (CUC\$45/23 per person for one/two people), and includes some unlikely ports of call, such as the Museo Municipal de Regla, Callejón de Hamel, the Museo de Arte Religioso, and the Adhat Israel Synagogue. And you thought all Cubans were atheists...?

And then there's the 'Art of Rum' tour (CUC\$15), which involves a visit to the Museo del Ron, followed by drinks, cocktails and yet more complimentary drinks. It's for serious drinkers only.

Social Programs

SAN CRISTÓBAL AGENCIA

DE VIAJES Map p220

☎ 861-9171/2; www.viajessancristobal.cu; Oficinos No 110 btwn Lamparilla & Armagura

This fascinating ramble through some of Habana Vieja's groundbreaking social projects (p42) is as educational as it is unique. Negotiated on foot, the three-hour tour (CUC\$10) uncovers a range of projects that have benefited from money raised via the city's tourist sector. There are visits to a maternity home, a rehabilitation center for children with diseases of the central nervous system, an embroiderers' workshop and the beautiful Convento de Nuestra Señora de Belén, now used as a residence and community center for the elderly.

HABANA VIEJA

Eating p111; Shopping p151; Sleeping p158; Walking Tours p100

Studded with architectural jewels from every era, Habana Vieja offers visitors one of the finest collections of urban edifices in the Americas. At a conservative estimate, the old town contains over 900 buildings of historical importance, with myriad examples of illustrious architecture ranging from intricate baroque to glitzy art deco.

But Habana Vieja is far more than just a living museum. Home to over 70,000 *habaneros*, who live squeezed into an area of just 4.5 sq km, the neighborhood is also one of the most condensed living spaces in Latin America. Rubbing shoulders with the rising star of tourist Habana are crumbling buildings, run-down ration shops and pot-holed streets.

Founded as one of Cuba's original seven settlements in 1519, Habana Vieja contained the full extent of the city until the growth of Centro Habana in the early 19th century. Between 1674 and 1863, the quarter was ringed by a 5km-long defensive wall and huge ships weighed down with precious metals from Mexico and Peru were regular visitors to the city's busy harbor.

As the city expanded westward in the 19th and 20th centuries, Habana Vieja became something of a forgotten district. Its renaissance began in the early 1980s when Unesco, in association with the talented city historian Eusebio Leal, instituted a plan to restore the old town to its former glory.

These days Habana Vieja is in the midst of one of the most extensive and ambitious renovation projects in the Americas.

TRANSPORTATION

Bus Bus 400 from Playas del Este and eastern Habana drops you on the corner of Calles Agramonte (Zuñeta) and Gloria, near the train station. The M-1 from Alamar and eastern Habana also stops in Calle Agramonte near the tunnel.

Ferry The ferry from Casablanca and Regla arrives and departs from the Muelle Luz on Calle San Pedro.

Horse Carriage Horse carriages congregate in Plaza de San Francisco de Asís, and on the corner of Calle Obispo and Mercaderes.

Taxi The best place to hail a cab is in Parque Central or on the northeast corner of Plaza de Armas.

Characterized by its narrow cobbled streets and punctuated by striking churches and pretty colonial plazas, the district – particularly at night – is truly transfixing, and you'll need little imagination to summon up the images of centuries past.

Orientation

Habana Vieja sits on the western side of the harbor channel in an area once bounded by 17th-century city walls, which ran along present-day Av de Bélgica (Egido and Monserrate) and Av de las Misiones (Monserrate). The district is laid out in a rough diamond-shaped grid; its main artery is pedestrianized Calle Obispo, while most of the more interesting tourist sights are clustered around the four main squares of Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza Vieja, Plaza de San Francisco de Asís and Plaza de Armas, which lie at the eastern end of the neighborhood.

AQUARIUM Map p220

☎ 863-9493; Brasil No 9 btwn Mercaderes

& Oficinas; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun

This small freshwater aquarium in a tasteful old building in Habana Vieja contains eight tanks and a varied collection of fish from around the world; it's great for the kids.

CÁMARA OSCURA Map p220

cnr Mercaderes & Brasil; admission CUC\$2;

☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun

Situated on the corner of Plaza Vieja in the eye-catching Gómez Vila building, this fun old-town diversion provides 360-degree views of the city from a telescopic lens atop a 35m-tall tower. Sheets flap in the breeze, old cars amble by, and the docent does an admirable job explaining Habana's architectural highlights in Spanish and English during a 10-minute 'virtual' tour.

CASA DE ÁFRICA Map p220

☎ 861-5798; Obrapia No 157; admission CUC\$2;

☎ 9:30am-7:30pm

This is a small museum that houses artifacts presented to Fidel Castro during his 1977 Africa tour. Objects from no fewer than 26 countries are presented here. Also on display are objects relating to the Afro-Cuban religion Santería, which were formerly in the collection of celebrated Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz.

CASA DE ASIA Map p220

☎ 863-9740; Mercaderes No 111; admission free;

☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun

Sometimes known as the Museo de Asia, or the Museo de Arte del Lejano Oriente, this quirky cultural house exhibits painting and sculpture from Asia, with a special focus on China and Japan. The building dates from 1688, and the museum opened in 1997.

CASA DE LA OBRA PÍA Map p220

Obrapia No 158; admission CUC\$1, camera CUC\$2;

☎ 9am-4:30pm Tue-Sat, 9:30am-12:30pm Sun

This typical Habana aristocratic residence was originally built in 1665, and was rebuilt in 1780, soon after the British occupation. It is named for the piety of its original owner, Martín Calvo de la Puerta, who was well known for lending economic support to orphans over a period of many years (*obra pía* means 'charitable work'). Baroque decoration – including an intricate portico, which was made in Cádiz, Spain – covers the exterior facade, and at 1480 sq m this grandiose home was the largest in the neighborhood at the time it was erected.

As well as its historical connections, the house today also contains one of the city historian's most commendable social projects, a sewing-and-needlecraft cooperative that has a workshop inside and a small shop selling clothes and textiles on Calle Mercaderes.

CASA DE LOMBILLO Map p220

cnr Empedrado & Mercaderes

This resplendent *casa* (house) is one of Habana's oldest, dating from 1741, although there has been a building on this site since 1618. Named after one of its 18th-century owners, the count of Lombillo, who made his fortune in the slave trade, the building is most notable for its exquisite interior balconies and stately Tuscan-style columns. During the mid-19th century the palace served as Habana's main post office (it was the city's first), and a stone-mask mailbox in one of the outside walls is still in use. In late 2000, the Casa de Lombillo was gutted and restored. It now functions as the main office for the city historian, Eusebio Leal Spengler.

CASA DE LOS CONDES DE JARUCO

Map p220

☎ 861-8544; Muralla No 107; admission free;

☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat

With its wide gallery, this house is said to be typical of aristocratic residences built around 1737. Although the house is named after the counts of Jaruco, its most famous resident was María Mercedes de Santa Cruz y Cárdenas, who was born in the mansion and went on to become one of the city's early literary greats. Today the building houses La Casona Centro de Arte (p152).

CASA DE MÉXICO BENITO JUÁREZ

Map p220

☎ 861-8166; cnr Obrapia & Mercaderes; admission

CUC\$1; ☎ 10:15am-5:45pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun

Named after Mexico's long-serving indigenous president and hero, the Casa de Benito Juárez exhibits Mexican folk art in an 18th-century palace. However, there's not a whole lot about Señor Juárez himself at the museum bearing his name.

CASA OSWALDO GUAYASAMÍN

Map p220

☎ 861-3843; Obrapia No 111; donations accepted;

☎ 9am-2:30pm Tue-Sun

This is the former workshop and home of the notable Ecuadorian painter Oswaldo Guayasamín, who lived in Habana for many years before his death in March 1999. Guayasamín is most famous for paintings of Fidel produced during the '80s and '90s; one of them is normally displayed in the Fundación Naturaleza y El Hombre (p90). The Ecuadorian also painted many other famous figures, including Raúl Castro, Eusebio Leal and Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, but unfortunately you won't find any of these portraits here. Instead the house showcases exhibits of Cuban and international art, although the place is actually more impressive for its finely worked iron railings, marble staircases, graceful arches and other architectural features.

CASTILLO DE LA REAL FUERZA

Map p220

☎ 861-6130; Plaza de Armas; admission CUC\$2;

☎ 9am-6pm

The oldest existing fort in the Americas, the Castillo de Real Fuerza was built between

HABANA VIEJA TOP FIVE

- Museo de la Ciudad (p74)
- Museo del Ron (p75)
- Plaza de la Catedral (p77)
- Edificio Bacardí (right)
- Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís El Nuevo (p72)

1558 and 1577 on the site of an earlier fort destroyed by French privateers in 1555. The west tower is crowned by a copy of a famous bronze weather vane called La Giraldilla; the original was cast in Habana in 1632 by Jerónimo Martínez Pinzón and is popularly believed to be of Doña Inés de Bobadilla, the wife of gold-explorer Hernando de Soto. It is now kept in the Museo de la Ciudad (p74), and the figure also appears on the Havana Club rum label. For the first 200 years of its existence, the Castillo was the residence of the Spanish captains general, until they finally got around to constructing a palace of their own across the square. Imposing and indomitable, the castle is ringed by an impressive moat and its walls, like those of other forts facing the Caribbean, are made from blocks of coral. Today, La Fuerza shelters the Museo de la Cerámica Artística Cubana, along with a bar, snack stand and souvenir shop.

CATEDRAL DE SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LA HABANA

Map p220

cnr San Ignacio & Empedrado
Dominated by two unequal towers and framed by a theatrical baroque facade designed in the style of Italian architect Francesco Borromini, Habana's graceful Catedral de San Cristóbal was once described by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier as 'music set in stone.'

When the Jesuits began construction of the church in 1748, Habana was still under the ecclesiastical control of Santiago de Cuba. Work continued despite the expulsion of the Jesuits from Cuba in 1767, and the diocese of Habana was finally created when the building was finished in 1787. A year later the city became a bishop's seat, elevating the church to a cathedral – one of the oldest in the Americas. Legend has it that the cathedral contained a dramatic funeral monument dedicated to Christopher Columbus, which held the great explorer's remains. It's said that the monument was

shipped to Spain in 1898, where it is interred in Seville's cathedral.

One of the cathedral's many curiosities is its surprisingly austere classical interior, the work of a pious bishop at the beginning of the 19th century. To take a peep at the pews and altar your best bet is to slip inside at 10:30am during Sunday Mass. Otherwise opening times can be sporadic.

Pope John Paul II said one of his four Cuban Masses at the cathedral in January 1998 during a groundbreaking papal tour of the island.

CENTRO CULTURAL PABLO DE LA TORRIENTE BRAU

Map p220

☎ 861-6251; Muralla No 63; admission free;

🕒 Tue-Sat 9am-5:30pm

A leading cultural institution that was formed under the auspices of the Unión Nacional des Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (Uneac; National Union of Cuban Writers & Artists) in 1996, this center hosts a variety of expositions of substance, including poetry readings and a live acoustic music series called Guitarra Limpia. Its Salón de Arte Digital is renowned for its groundbreaking digital art.

CENTRO WIFREDO LAM

Map p220

☎ 862-2611; San Ignacio No 22 cnr Empedrado;

admission CUC\$3; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat

This exhibition center is named after Cuba's most famous painter (p31), though these days it is more likely to display works by lesser-known Latin artists. A Cuban of Chinese and African ancestry, Lam (1902–82) was strongly influenced by Pablo Picasso, whom he met in Paris in 1936 and under whom he studied for a brief period. Much of the artist's best work can be viewed today at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (p82). This venue, just off Plaza de la Catedral, also contains a small shop and a patio café that was being renovated at the time of writing.

EDIFICIO BACARDÍ

Map p220

Av de las Misiones btwn Neptuno & Empedrado
Finished in 1929, the magnificent Edificio Bacardí is a triumph of art deco architecture, with a whole host of lavish furnishings that somehow manage to blend the kitsch with the cool. Hemmed in by other buildings, it's hard to get a full kaleidoscopic view of

the structure from street level, though the opulent bell tower can be glimpsed from all over Habana. There's a bar in the lobby and for a few convertibles you can travel up to the tower for a bird's-eye view.

EDIFICIO SANTO DOMINGO

Map p220

Mercaderes btwn Obispo & O'Reilly

Across Obispo from the Hotel Ambos Mundos lies the site of Habana's original university, which stood at this intersection from 1728 until 1902, after which it was moved to its present location in Vedado. It was housed in the now defunct Santo Domingo convent, a huge building that had been commissioned in 1574 by Father Santo Domingo de Guzmán and altered radically to fit in with the new baroque style in 1777. The convent was partly demolished in 1919 and razed completely 30 years later when the Americans sponsored the building of a grotesque and totally incongruous 1950s-style office block whose roof was used as a helicopter landing pad. Accepting one of its biggest challenges yet, the City Historian's Office completed an ambitious restoration project in 2006 that rebuilt the convent's original bell tower and inserted an elaborate baroque doorway into the ugly modern building. The result provides an interesting juxtaposition of old against new. As well as housing a number of relocated departments from Habana University, the restored Edificio Santo Domingo also contains a scale model of the old convent and – in the adjoining tower – the original antique bell.

ESTACIÓN CENTRAL DE FERROCARRILES

Map p220

Av de Bélgica cnr Arsenal

Train lovers will adore Cuba, the only country in the Caribbean with a fully functioning rail system. In 1837 it was the first place in Latin America (and the sixth in the world) to install a railway network; ironically, colonial masters Spain didn't open their own railway network until nearly a decade later. Built upon the ruins of an old Spanish shipyard with two renaissance-style towers, Habana's central station first opened its doors for business in 1912 (an older station had stood on the site of the present-day Capitolio). The spacious waiting rooms and wide platforms have seen few alterations in the 100 years since.

FARMACIA MUSEO TAQUECHEL

Map p220

☎ 862-9286; Obispo No 155 btwn San Ignacio & Mercaderes; admission free; 🕒 9am-7pm

This old-fashioned store dating from 1898 is one of several restored 19th-century pharmacies in Habana Vieja. Inside you'll find shelves lined with rows of fine French porcelain jars. The pharmacy also sells natural therapeutic products and homeopathic medicines.

FOTOTECA DE CUBA

Map p220

☎ 862-2530; Mercaderes No 307; admission free;

🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat

In the Casa de Juan Rico de Mata on Plaza Vieja, this photo gallery run by the Fototeca de Cuba displays intriguing exhibits by local and international artists.

FUNDACIÓN ALEJO CARPENTIER

Map p220

Casa de la Condesa de la Reunion; Empedrado

No 215 btwn Aguiar & Cuba; admission free;

🕒 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri

The small Carpentier foundation is named for one of Cuba's most lauded writers, Alejo Carpentier (1904–80), the son of a French man and a Russian woman, who was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, but moved to Cuba as a child. Built in 1809, this house – where Carpentier once kept an office – has a small museum displaying some of the writer's personal effects. Carpentier was a magic-realist writer who also dabbled in nonfiction. His works include *La Consagración de la Primavera* and his seminal work *Music in Cuba*.

HOTEL AMBOS MUNDOS

Map p220

Obispo No 153

As well as being a restored Habaguanex hotel (p160), the Ambos Mundos is also a shrine to the late, great Ernest Hemingway who 'lived' here on and off throughout the 1930s. Real suckers for the legend can visit Room No 511 (admission CUC\$2; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), where the expat American began writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, though you're probably better off investigating the bar downstairs, where there is an interesting photo wall (including a snapshot of Hemingway and Fidel at a 1960 fishing tournament) and a fine resident pianist who'll serenade you with Sinatra tunes on a shiny grand.

IGLESIA DE SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS EL NUEVO

Map p220
cnr Cuba & Amargura

Still in the throes of a lengthy restoration, this unique church near Plaza Vieja was once known as the Iglesia de San Agustín. Built in 1633, it was reconsecrated in 1842 and taken over by the Franciscan order, which had recently lost its tenancy in the Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís a few blocks to the east. Thanks to its earlier incarnation under Augustine monks, the church still retains a notable Mexican flavor, including ochre pillars, intricate stained glass, haunting frescoes and a gorgeously painted inner dome.

IGLESIA DE SAN FRANCISCO DE PAULA

Map p220
cnr Leonor Pérez & Desamparados

Standing on a traffic island on Calle Desamparados, this church, dating from 1664, is all that remains of the San Francisco de Paula women's hospital. Rebuilt after a hurricane in 1730, the hospital was demolished in the 1940s, but the church remained as an architectural oddity until a 2000 restoration transformed it into a classical-music venue. Lit up at night for concerts (most notably by the medieval ensemble *Ars Longa*), the church's stained glass, heavy cupola and baroque facade are utterly romantic and inviting.

IGLESIA DEL SANTO ANGEL CUSTODIO

Map p220
☎ 861-0469; Compostela No 2

Originally constructed in 1695, the Santo Angel was pounded by a ferocious hurricane in 1846, after which it was entirely rebuilt in neo-Gothic style. Among the notable historical and literary figures that have passed through its handsome doors are 19th-century Cuban novelist Cirilo Villaverde, who set the main scene of his novel *Cecilia Valdés* here, and Felix Varela and José Martí, who were baptized in the church in 1788 and 1853, respectively.

IGLESIA PARROQUIAL DEL ESPÍRITU SANTO

Map p220
☎ 862-3140; Acosta No 161; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-6pm
Habana's oldest surviving church was built as a chapel with slave labor in 1638, but was extensively altered in 1674 when it was

declared a parish church. While the exquisite baroque wooden lattice gate outside is eye-catching, the true masterpieces lie within, including a modern sculpture by Alfredo Lozano and a large painting by Cuban artist Arístides Fernández. The finely carved ceiling also deserves a look. Catacombs run on both sides of the nave, supported by the stumps of buried trees, and there are many burials in the crypt. A royal decree issued by King Charles III of Spain in the late 18th century gave the automatic right of asylum to anyone who set foot in the church.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE BELÉN

Map p220
☎ 861-7283; Compostela btwn Luz & Acosta;
admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat,
9am-1pm Sun

Completed in 1718, the Convento Belén was used initially by nuns from the Order of Bethlehem as a convalescent home. When the order was suppressed in 1842, the convent was passed onto to the Spanish government who, in turn, passed it over to the Jesuits. In the ensuing years, the structure was substantially enlarged to occupy a full city block and a school was added. The church inside has a nave with vaulted transepts and the gate is adorned with stone statues that display various images of the saints. The structure is also known for a unique baroque arch – the Arco de Belén – that stands at the corner of Acosta and Compostela.

The City Historian's Office's biggest social project, the convent today is (once again) a convalescent home where elderly people from the surrounding neighborhood come to relax, paint, enjoy live theater and receive occupational therapy; there are even some live-in residents.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA MERCED

Map p220
Cuba No 806; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-5:30pm
Built over a period of a century, this small but compact church was completed by monks in 1867. Traditionally a bastion of the Habana aristocracy, the Merced is a long-favored site for weddings due to its stunningly beautiful interior, which includes colorful trompe l'oeil frescoes, elaborate dome paintings and a magnificent altar. The best time to visit the church is on September 24, the feast day of the Virgin of the

Merced. On this day, Catholic and African beliefs come together in the veneration of two saints in one image: the Virgin Mary and Obatalá, the Yoruba goddess of the earth. The statue of the Virgin sporting a flowing white robe stands on the altar.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE SANTA CLARA

Map p220
☎ 866-9327; Cuba No 610 btwn Luz & Sol;
admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri

This huge construction – which covers four city blocks – was the first nunnery in Habana. Built from 1638 to 1643, it was founded by nuns from Cartagena de Indias. Look out for the marvelous beamed ceiling in the nave, and the handsome columns and pleasing arches in the main cloister. Among the many residences here is the Casa del Marino (Sailor's House), in the second cloister. According to records, this house (the current residence of academics) was built by a pirate-turned-respectable-shipowner who gave the building to his devout daughter.

Ceasing to be a convent in 1920, the Santa Clara became the Ministry of Public Works. Today the team in charge of the restoration of colonial Habana is based here, and the complex also offers a small guesthouse, the *Residencia Académica de Santa Clara* (p158), one of Habana Vieja's cheapest budget hotels.

IGLESIA Y MONASTERIO DE SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS

Map p220
Plaza de San Francisco de Asís
Originally constructed as a church in 1608 and rebuilt in the baroque style from 1719 to 1738, the Iglesia San Francisco de Asís was taken over by the Spanish state in 1841 as part of a political move against the powerful religious orders of the day. It ceased to be a consecrated church, and later served as a warehouse and post office. Protected from the public gaze are three former cloisters, spacious courtyards and more than 100 tiny apartments for members of the monastery. Today the church serves as a concert hall (p131), featuring classical, chamber and choral music. The *Museo de Arte Religioso* (unguided/guided CUC\$2/3; ☎ 9am-6pm) is replete with religious paintings, silverware, wood carvings and ceramics. The admission price for the museum includes access to the tallest bell tower in Habana.

LONJA DEL COMERCIO

Map p220
Plaza de San Francisco de Asís
This large box-shaped building on Plaza de San Francisco is a former commodities market erected in 1909. In 1996 the building was completely renovated by Habaguanex and today it provides office space for foreign companies with joint ventures in Cuba. You can enter the Lonja to admire its central atrium and futuristic interior. It also houses the excellent café-restaurant *El Mercurio* (p113), named after the bronze figure of the god Mercury that sits atop a dome on the roof.

MAQUETA DE LA HABANA VIEJA

Map p220
Mercaderes No 114; unguided/guided CUC\$1/2;
☎ 9am-6pm

This is a scale model of Habana Vieja, complete with an authentic soundtrack that is meant to replicate a day in the life of the city. It's incredibly detailed and provides an excellent way to geographically acquaint yourself with what the central historical district has to offer. Come here first!

MUSEO CARLOS FINLAY

Map p220
Cuba btwn Amargura & Brasil; admission CUC\$2;
☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat
Named after Cuba's most famous scientist, this engaging museum on Calle Cuba is also home to the Academia de Ciencias Médicas, Físicas y Naturales (Academy of Medical, Physical & Natural Sciences). A physician of French and Scottish descent, Finlay (1833–1915) was the first scientist to identify the mosquito as the organism that caused yellow fever. Later on he became Cuba's chief medical officer and a respected figure within the Latin American scientific community. The museum displays numerous busts and paintings related to the scientist's remarkable life, along with a stash of over 95,000 medical books.

MUSEO DE ARTE COLONIAL

Map p220
☎ 862-6440; San Ignacio No 61; guided/unguided CUC\$2/3; ☎ 9am-6:30pm
On the south side of the Plaza de la Catedral, this is a small museum displaying colonial furniture and decorative arts in the former Palacio de los Condes de Casa Bayona (Palace of the Counts of Casa Bayona); it's the oldest house on the

square, dating from 1720. Among the finer exhibits are pieces of china with scenes of colonial Cuba, a collection of ornamental flowers, and many colonial-era dining room sets. To wander the rooms of the Palacio de los Condes de Casa Bayona today is to get an accurate picture of the interiors of 18th- and 19th-century Habana mansions.

MUSEO DE LA CIUDAD Map p220

☎ 861-6130; Tacón No 1; unguided/guided CUC\$3/4; 🕒 9am-6pm

Located in the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (p76) and set around a splendid central courtyard adorned with a white marble statue of Christopher Columbus, this is one of Habana's most comprehensive and interesting museums, and is worthy of a good couple of hours of your time. The rooms are richly decorated with period furniture, military uniforms, 19th-century horse carriages and personal artifacts of citizens past, while old photos vividly re-create events from Habana's rich history, such as the 1898 sinking of US battleship *Maine* in the harbor. War buffs will appreciate the rooms dedicated to Cuba's independence struggles from 1868 until 1959. The guided tour takes you into several otherwise inaccessible areas.

MUSEO DE LA FARMACIA HABANERA

Map p220

☎ 866-7556; cnr Brasil & Compostela; admission free; 🕒 9am-7pm

Founded in 1886 by Catalan José Sarrá and once considered the second-most important pharmacy in the world, this old-fashioned store on Calle Brasil (Teniente Rey) got the Habaguanex makeover in 2004 when a small museum was incorporated into the existing structure. Aside from the elegant mock-up of an old drugstore with long wooden counters and well-polished glass display jars, the store still acts as an important working pharmacy for the people of the neighborhood.

MUSEO DE LA ORFEBRERÍA Map p220

☎ 863-9861; Obispo No 113 btwn Mercaderes & Oficios; donations accepted; 🕒 9am-4:30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-12:30pm Mon

The museum of silverware is located in the former house of silversmith Gregorio Tabares, who had a workshop here from 1707.

Various items made by Habana silversmiths between the 18th and 20th centuries are displayed inside, and they're not half bad considering the island's notable lack of the precious metal. Curios include jewels, clocks, ashtrays and desktops.

MUSEO DE NAIPES Map p220

☎ 860-1534; Muralla No 101; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Sun

Exhibited in one of Plaza Vieja's oldest structures, dating from the 17th century, is one of Habana's more obscure museums. Dedicated to a collection of playing cards, it has everything from rock stars to rum drinks to round cards – there are 2000 of them here.

MUSEO DE NUMISMÁTICO Map p220

☎ 861-5811; Obispo btwn Aguilar & Habana; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-4:45pm

Numismatists will love this well-presented museum on Habana Vieja's main thoroughfare. It brings together various collections of medals, coins and banknotes from around the world, including a stash of 1000 mainly American gold coins (ranging in date from 1869 to 1928) given to Fidel Castro by eminent Swiss biologist Dr Albert Thut. Other highlights include Greek, Roman and early Spanish coins, plus a full chronology of Cuban banknotes from the 19th century to the present, including the infamous peso bills signed by the former president of the National Bank, Che Guevara.

MUSEO DE PINTURA MURAL Map p220

Obispo btwn Mercaderes & Oficios; donations accepted; 🕒 10am-6pm

Hidden in the Casa del Mayorazgo de Recio – popularly considered to be Habana's oldest surviving house – this museum tracks the history in Cuba of wall paintings and frescoes, a style that was vogue throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in the cities of Habana, Trinidad and Camagüey. The building itself dates from the 1570s, when it belonged to Antón de Recio, a Spaniard from Huelva province in Andalucía, who owned one of the island's oldest sugar mills and married the daughter of a local *cacique* (chief). Originally a one-story construction, a second floor was added in the 17th century, though the house retains many of its earlier Mudéjar elements, including a patio, storage

well, wooden window grilles and some beautifully restored frescoes.

MUSEO DE SIMÓN BOLÍVAR Map p220

Mercaderes No 160; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sat

A diminutive museum dedicated to Latin America's great liberator, who remains a perennial hero to most Cubans. Downstairs there are panels containing text in English, French and Spanish that describe Bolívar's life and his many accomplishments. Upstairs there's a reproduction of his sword, a coin minted in his honor and paintings of him by contemporary artists. There is a bronze statue of Simón Bolívar in a small park across the road.

MUSEO DE TABACO Map p220

☎ 861-5795; Mercaderes No 120; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat

Inside here you'll find a standard cigar salesroom plus displays of assorted cigar paraphernalia. Among the many Casa del Habano cigar stores in the city, this is one of the best.

MUSEO DEL AUTOMÓVIL Map p220

Oficios No 13; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-7pm

One of Habana's most amusing sights is this small and vaguely surreal museum, stuffed full of ancient Thunderbirds, Pontiacs and Ford Model Ts, at least half of which appear to be in better shape than the asthmatic automobiles that ply the streets outside. It's even got the green Chevrolet Bel Air that Che Guevara once drove (very badly apparently) after he was installed as a member of the revolutionary government in 1959. Other notable vehicles include a 1930 La Salle Model 340, a 1926 Willy's Overland Whippet 96, a horse-drawn fire engine dating from 1894 and the 1918 Ford Model T truck that belonged to Castro's father.

MUSEO DEL RON Map p220

☎ 861-8051; San Pedro No 262; admission incl guide CUC\$5; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun

Even for teetotalers, this intriguing museum in the Fundación Havana Club is worth a turn. The interesting bilingual guided tour shows rum-making antiquities (check out the funky terracotta flask), and explains the entire brewing process, from cane cutting to quaffing amber Añejo Reserva in the

museum's tasting room. The scale model of the Central La Esperanza sugar mill factory, with working train, is especially cool. The dancing lessons (p145) here are some of the best in Habana.

MUSEO EL TEMPLETE Map p220

Plaza de Armas; admission CUC\$2; 🕒 8:30am-6pm

This tiny neoclassical Doric chapel on the east side of the Plaza de Armas was erected in 1828 at the point where Habana's first Mass was held beneath a ceiba tree in November 1519. A similar ceiba tree has now replaced the original. Inside the chapel are three large paintings of the event by the French painter Jean Baptiste Vermay.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE HISTORIA NATURAL Map p220

☎ 863-9361; Obispo No 61; admission CUC\$3; 🕒 9:30-7pm Tue-Sun

This average museum in Plaza de Armas contains examples of Cuba's flora and fauna. Next door is the Biblioteca Pública Provincial Rubén M Villena (p193), a public library.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE LA MÚSICA

Map p220

☎ 863-0052; Capdevila No 1; 🕒 10am-5:45pm

The collection of Cuban musical instruments exhibited in this glittering 1905 residence built in Italian Renaissance style includes vintage pianos, bongo drums, guitars, maracas, claves and even a xylophone from Laos. There's a small shop near the entrance that sells recordings of Cuban music, and concerts – including some great rumba – take place in the music room a couple of nights a week. The museum was temporarily closed for renovation at the time of writing.

MUSEO-CASA NATAL DE JOSÉ MARTÍ

Map p220

☎ 861-3778; Leonor Pérez No 314; admission CUC\$1, camera CUC\$2; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sat

The apostle of Cuban independence was born in this humble, two-story dwelling on the edge of Habana Vieja on January 28, 1853. Today it's a small museum that displays letters, manuscripts, photos, books and other mementos of his life. While it's not as comprehensive as the Memorial a José Martí (p86) in Plaza de la Revolución, it's a charming little house and is well worth the walk.

OLD CITY WALL Map p220**Av de Bélgica**

At the southern end of Av de Bélgica, close to the train station, lies the longest remaining stretch of the old city wall. The wall, which was designed to deter attacks from pirates and buccaneers, was begun in 1674 and took over 60 years to build. On its completion, it measured 1.5m thick, 10m high and 5km long. A bronze map at the remnants of the wall shows the outline of the original layout. Among the defenses erected along its course were nine bastions and some 180 big guns aimed toward the sea. The only way in and out of the city from 1740 until the demolition of the wall began on August 8, 1863, was through 11 highly guarded gates that closed every night and opened every morning at the sound of a solitary gunshot. Many of the stones used to pave Habana's streets and construct the city's buildings were pulled from the monstrous wall, much of which still stood five decades after its demolition began.

PALACIO CUETO Map p220**cnr Muralla & Mercaderes**

Habana's finest art nouveau building was constructed in 1906, based on the designs of architect Arturo Márquez. Located on the southeast corner of Plaza Vieja, it exhibits distinct Gaudi-esque features. Its outrageously ornate facade housed a warehouse and a hat factory before it was rented by a Señor José Cueto as the Palacio Vienna hotel a decade or so later. The property has been empty and unused since the early '90s, but Habaguanex has pledged to restore the property as a period hotel. Scaffolding suggests work is already underway.

PALACIO DE GOBIERNO Y VAGÓN**MAMBI** Map p220

☎ 863-4352; Oficios No 211; admission free;

🕒 8:30am-4:45pm

This eclectic palace on Calle Oficios was the former seat of the Cuban government from 1902 until 1929 (when the Capitolio was completed). Furnished with decorative baroque details and an Italian marble floor, the museum contains a parliament room, the former president's office and the original Cuban flag used by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. To the side of the building on Churruca is the Vagón Mambi, a train

car built in the US in 1900 and brought to Cuba in 1912. Put into service as the presidential car, it's a palace on wheels, with a formal dining room, louvered wooden windows and, back in its heyday, fans that cooled the car with dry ice.

PALACIO DE LOS CAPITANES GENERALES Map p220**Tacón No 1**

Filling the whole west side of the Plaza de Armas, this former palace is one of Cuba's most majestic baroque buildings. It stands on the site of Habana's original church, the Parroquial Mayor, which was established in 1574 but was damaged by the explosion of the *Invencible* in Habana harbor in 1741. Due to ongoing damage, the church was subsequently demolished in 1776. The current building dates from the late 1770s and it has served many purposes over the years. From 1791 until 1898, it was the residence of the Spanish captains general. From 1899 until 1902, the US military governors were based here, and during the first two decades of the 20th century the building briefly became the presidential palace. In 1920 the president moved to the palace now housing the Museo de la Revolución and the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales became the city hall. The municipal authorities moved out in 1967, and since 1968 it has been home to the Museo de la Ciudad (p74).

PALACIO DE LOS CONDES**DE SANTOVENIA** Map p220**Calle Baratillo No 9**

Habaguanex' five-star Hotel Santa Isabel (p162) is a historic building in its own right and a former stately palace of the counts of Santovenia. It dates from the 1780s and was converted into a luxurious hotel in 1867, making it one of Habana's oldest hotels. Habaguanex gave the place a much needed makeover in the 1990s, which was good enough for ex-US president Jimmy Carter, who stayed here during his groundbreaking 2002 visit.

PALACIO DE LOS MARQUESSES DE AGUAS CLARAS Map p220**San Ignacio No 54**

Situated on the western side of the Plaza de la Catedral, this majestic building completed in 1760 was a one-time baroque

palace widely lauded for the beauty of its shady Andalucian patio. Today it houses the **Restaurante El Patio** (p114), a choice spot for an alfresco drink or meal in front of the ethereal cathedral. You'll be serenaded 24 hours a day by live music – three bands alternate eight-hour shifts.

PALACIO DEL MARQUÉS DE ARCOS**Map p220****Plaza de la Catedral**

Completed in 1746, this luxurious former residential mansion is a perfect example of a typical Spanish-American colonial house, with a spacious main room with a wide staircase that hugs two walls as it winds up to the 2nd floor. Five arcades of Doric columns adorn the ground floor and lovely porticoes above the arcades overlook the square. The main entrance to the building is on Calle Mercaderes.

PALACIO DEL SEGUNDO CABO**Map p220**

Calle O'Reilly No 4; admission CUC\$1;

🕒 10am-5:30pm Mon-Sat

Situated on the northwest corner of the Plaza de Armas, this is the former headquarters of the Spanish vice-governor, constructed in 1772. For a time the building acted as a post office, then during the 20th century it variously served as the palace of the Senate, the nation's Supreme Court, the National Academy of Arts & Letters, and, for a brief period, the seat of the Cuban Geographical Society. Today most of the building is used by the Instituto Cubano del Libro and houses a well-stocked bookstore just inside the entrance. Architectural buffs should check out the lovely inner courtyard.

PLAZA DE ARMAS Map p220

Habana's oldest square was conceived in the early 1520s, soon after the city's foundation. It was originally known as Plaza de Iglesia after the church – the Parroquial Mayor – that once stood on the site of the present-day Palacio del los Capitanes Generales. The name Plaza de Armas (Parade Ground) wasn't adopted until the late 16th century, when the governor of the Castillo Real de la Fuerza used the site to conduct military exercises. The modern plaza, along with most of the buildings around it, dates only from the late 1700s when, minus its

church, it became a park that filled nightly with lilting music and carriages used by ladies and their suitors.

In the center of the square, which is lined with royal palms and characterized by a daily (except Sunday) **secondhand book market** (p152), is a **marble statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes**, the man who set Cuba on the road to independence in 1868. Long a favored rest spot for travelers and inquisitive Cubans, this is a pleasant place to sit on a bench and listen to the typical Cuban music drifting across the square from the restaurant **La Mina** (p113).

PLAZA DE LA CATEDRAL Map p220

Habana Vieja's most uniform square is a museum to Cuban baroque, with all the surrounding buildings – including the city's magnificent **cathedral** (p70) – dating from the 1700s. Despite this homogeneity, it is actually the newest of the four squares in the old town, with its present layout dating from the 18th century. Attractive, diminutive and spine-tinglingly atmospheric, the plaza is best enjoyed at nighttime, when the winking lanterns lend the shadowy walls an almost timeless quality and, with a little imagination, you can transport yourself back to the days of beer-swilling pirates and horse-drawn carriages.

PLAZA DE SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS**Map p220**

Facing Habana harbor, the breezy Plaza de San Francisco de Asís first grew up in the 16th century, when New World prospectors disembarked at the quayside and Spanish galleons stopped by on their passage through the Indies to Spain. A market took root on this spot in the 1500s, followed by a church in 1608, though when the pious monks complained of too much noise the market was moved a few blocks south to Plaza Vieja. The Plaza de San Francisco underwent a full restoration in the late 1990s and is most notable for its uneven cobbles and the white-marble **Fuente de los Leones** (Fountain of Lions), carved by the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Gagini in 1836. A more modern statue outside the square's famous church depicts **El Caballero de París**, a well-known street person who roamed Habana during the 1950s, with his unkempt beard and rough bag of belongings, engaging passers-by with his philosophies on life,

religion, politics and current events. On the eastern side of the plaza stands the Terminal Sierra Maestra, which dispatches shiploads of tourists once or twice a week.

PLAZA DEL CRISTO Map p220

Habana Vieja's fifth (and most overlooked) square lies at the west end of the neighborhood, a little apart from the bustling historic core. The city historian's renovation project hasn't reached this far yet, as the plaza's clutch of dilapidated (and, in some cases, collapsing) buildings graphically testify. That's not to say it isn't worth a look. The plaza's main highlight is the **Parroquial del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje**, a church dating from 1732, although there has been a Franciscan hermitage on this site since 1640. Currently undergoing some long-awaited repairs, the church is most notable for its intricate stained-glass windows and brightly painted wooden ceiling. The Plaza del Cristo also boasts a children's school (hence the noise) and the blue-and-yellow restaurant **Hanoi** (p113), a longtime travelers' hangout.

PLAZA VIEJA Map p220

Laid out in 1559, Plaza Vieja (Old Sq) is Habana's most architecturally eclectic square, juxtaposing the baroque **Casa de los Condes de Jaruco** (p69) with the Gaudí-inspired **Palacio Cueto** (p76). Planned as a 'living' public space in the 16th century, Plaza Vieja – in contrast to other Latin American plazas – contains no church and was designed with the houses and private dwellings overlooking the central action. Initially known as Plaza Nueva (New Sq), it was a public square and a popular gathering place used for military exercises. It then served as an open-air marketplace until 1835, when the market moved and the square again became a popular place to gather and converse. More recently the Batista regime constructed an ugly underground parking lot here that engineers demolished in 1996. A massive renovation project began in the late 1990s and, as of 2006, only the Palacio Cueto and a rather scruffy dwelling on the west side were still awaiting the restorer's paintbrush. Sprinkled liberally with bars, restaurants and cafés, Plaza Vieja boasts its own micro-brewery – **La Taberna de la Muralla** (p135) – and the Angela Landa children's school (the square itself doubles as a school play-

ground), which is housed in a decorative neoclassical-art nouveau building. The beautiful fountain in the centre is a copy of an earlier fountain on this site.

CENTRO HABANA

Eating p116; Shopping p153; Sleeping p162; Walking Tours p101

Centro Habana, which borders Habana Vieja to the west, was built up in the mid-19th century when the burgeoning colonial city gradually outgrew its defensive walls. Its signature street is Paseo de Martí, laid out in the 1770s, while its nexus point is the diminutive Parque Central, ringed by a clutch of top-end hotels and crowned by a white-marble statue of Cuban national hero José Martí.

The area immediately to the west of the old town features some of Centro Habana's oldest architecture and is replete with interesting tourist attractions, including a cigar factory, a fine-arts museum and the famous **Capitolio Nacional**. West of Paseo de Martí lies a highly populated residential area that languishes in varying states of disrepair, but whose evocative backstreets pulsates with sultry Cuban atmosphere and the gritty essence of everyday city life. A stroll around this quarter during the daytime will quickly put you in touch with the sounds and secrets of the 'real' Habana: ration shops with antiquated cash registers, flailing lines of household washing, keys being lowered on string from upstairs windows, or groups of men of all ages slapping down dominoes on foldaway tables on the sidewalk. Centro Habana's best walking street is the famous oceanside Malecón, closely followed by Av de Italia (Galiano), which boasts a theater and a top-notch live-music venue. Its most polluted thoroughfare is Av Simón Bolívar (Reina), and its most quintessentially Cuban street is the pedestrianized shopping quarter of Calle San Rafael.

Architecturally Centro Habana is a transitional area linking the old with the new. In the east, grandiose neoclassical edifices mingle picturesquely with glorious neobaroque while, further west, exuberant art nouveau town houses lie half-hidden under decades of dirt and dust. Tucked away behind the Capitolio, the colorful Barrio Chino (Chinatown) provides one of the neighborhood's quirkiest and most unexpected surprises.

TRANSPORTATION

Bus Bus 400 from Playas del Este and eastern Habana stops on the corner of Calles Agramonte (Zulueta) and Gloria, a few blocks south of Parque Central. Bus M-1 from Alamar and eastern Habana stops on Agramonte on the Vieja–Centro border. Bus M-2 from Santiago de las Vegas, bus M-4 from western Playa via Marianao and Nuevo Vedado, and bus M-7 from San Francisco de Paula converge on Parque de la Fraternidad. **Taxi** Taxis, bici-taxis (bicycle taxis) and coco-taxis (distinctive yellow egg-shaped taxis) congregate in Parque Central, Parque Fraternidad and in front of the Capitolio Nacional.

Orientation

While its boundaries are often a little blurred, Centro Habana officially begins at the Av de las Misiones and runs west as far as Calzada de Infanta. To the north the neighborhood is bounded by the Straits of Florida and to the south it stretches as far as Arroyo (Av Manglar), though few travelers venture beyond Av Simón Bolívar. The main north–south thoroughfares are Calzada de Infanta, Padre Varela (Belascoain), Av de Italia and Paseo de Martí. Running east–west are the Malecón, Av Simón Bolívar and Neptuno. San Rafael is a pedestrian shopping street that runs between Paseo de Martí and Av de Italia. The bustling Barrio Chino is centered on Calle Cuchillo.

ASOCIACIÓN CULTURAL YORUBA DE CUBA Map p222

☎ 863-5953; Paseo de Martí No 615; admission CUC\$6; 🕒 9am–4pm Mon–Sat

The museum in this center provides a worthwhile overview of the Santería religion and the saints' powers, with 30-plus terracotta statues of the most important *orishas* (deities), including Changó, god of war, and Yemayá, goddess of the sea. There are free *tambores* (drum-jams-cum-ceremonies) on alternate Fridays at 4:30pm (when you can check out the museum for free), and you can also arrange consultations with a *santero* (Santería high priest). Note that there's a church dress code for the *tambores* – no shorts or sleeveless T-shirts.

CALLE SAN RAFAEL Map p222

The pedestrian street between the Hotel Inglaterra and the Gran Teatro – popularly

known as El Bulevar – is Centro Habana's main shopping precinct for Cubans, and offers a great insight into life away from the tourist haunts. Here you'll find local cinemas, peso-pizza stalls, and old 1950s department stores offering modest selections of imported clothing.

CAPITOLIO NACIONAL Map p222

☎ 863-7861; unguided/guided CUC\$3/4; 🕒 9am–8pm

The incomparable Capitolio is Habana's most ambitious and grandiose building. Similar to the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC, but (marginally) taller and much richer in detail, the work was initiated by Cuba's US-backed dictator Gerardo Machado in 1926 and took 5000 workers three years, two months and 20 days to build at a cost of US\$17 million. Formerly it was the seat of the Cuban Congress but, since 1959, it has housed the Cuban Academy of Sciences and the National Library of Science & Technology.

Constructed with white Capellanía limestone and block granite, the entrance is guarded by six rounded Doric columns atop a staircase that leads up from Paseo de Martí. A stone cupola rising 62m and topped with a replica of 16th-century Florentine sculptor Giambologna's bronze statue of Mercury looks out over the Habana skyline. Directly below the dome is a copy of a 24-carat diamond set in the floor. Highway distances between Habana and all sites in Cuba are calculated from this point.

The entryway opens up into the Salon de los Pasos Perdidos (Room of the Lost Steps), so named because of the room's unusual acoustics. At the center of the *salon* is the 'Statue of the Republic,' an enormous bronze woman standing 11m tall and representing the mythic guardian of virtue and work. In size, it's smaller only than the gold Buddha in Nava, Japan, and the Lincoln Monument in Washington, DC.

Tours of the Capitolio take in the entrance halls, the mahogany-covered library, and the former chamber of the Senate and deputies, and are well worth the small fee.

CASTILLO DE SAN SALVADOR DE LA PUNTA Map p222

☎ 860-3196; cnr Av del Puerto & Paseo de Martí; admission CUC\$5; 🕒 10am–6pm Wed–Sun
Designed by the Italian engineer Giovanni Bautista Antonelli and built between 1589

CENTRO HABANA TOP FIVE

- Museo de la Revolución (opposite)
- Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes – Colección de Arte Cubano (p82)
- Capitolio Nacional (p79)
- Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesus (opposite)
- El Prado (Paseo de Martí; below)

and 1600, this fort is a fine example of 16th-century Renaissance military architecture. In days of yore, a chain was stretched 250m to the castle of El Morro on the other side of the channel every night to close the harbor mouth to shipping. The castle's museum displays artifacts from sunken Spanish treasure fleets, a collection of model ships and information on the slave trade.

CENTRO GALLEGO Map p222 cnr Paseo de Martí & San Rafael

It might look unmistakably baroque, but the Centro Gallego, which was erected as a Galician social club in 1914, is a relatively modern 20th-century creation. The center, which contains myriad arcades, columns, balconies and sculptures, was built around the existing Teatro Tacón, which opened in 1838 with five masked Carnival dances. This history is the basis of claims by the present 2000-seat **Gran Teatro de la Habana** (☎ 861-3077; guided tours CUC\$2; 🕒 9am-6pm) that it's the oldest operating theater in the western hemisphere. History notwithstanding, the architecture is brilliant, as are many of the weekend performances (p131). The National Ballet of Cuba and the State Opera are based here. Upcoming shows are listed on the boards outside.

EL PRADO Map p222 Paseo de Martí

Construction of this stately European-style boulevard (officially known as Paseo de Martí) began outside the city walls in 1770, and the work was completed in the mid-1830s during the term of Captain General Miguel Tacón. He also constructed the original Parque Central. The idea behind El Prado was to create in Habana a boulevard as splendid as any found in Paris, Florence or Madrid. The famous bronze lions that guard the central promenade at either end were added in 1928.

FUENTE DE LA INDIA Map p222

Paseo de Martí

Don't miss this white Carrara marble fountain, carved by Giuseppe Gagini in 1837 for the count of Villanueva, situated on a traffic island in front of the Hotel Saratoga. It portrays a regal indigenous woman adorned with a crown of eagle's feathers and seated on a throne surrounded by four gargoyle-like dolphins. In one hand she holds a horn-shaped basket filled with fruit, in the other she holds a shield bearing the city's coat of arms – a golden key between two mountains, a sun above the sea, three stripes emblazoned on a white background, and a royal palm.

HOTEL INGLATERRA Map p222

Paseo de Martí No 416

Habana's oldest hotel (p164) first opened its doors in 1856 on the site of a popular bar called El Louvre. Facing leafy Parque Central, the building exhibits the neoclassical design features that were in vogue at the time, though the decor inside is distinctly Moorish. At a banquet here in 1879, José Martí made a speech advocating Cuban independence and, much later, US journalists covering the so-called Spanish-American War stayed at this hotel. War hero Antonio Maceo was another famous guest, and a letter he wrote on hotel notepaper is proudly displayed in the lobby. El Louvre (🕒 11am-midnight), named after the hotel's predecessor, is the Hotel Inglaterra's popular downstairs alfresco bar; it's situated under a colonnaded porch outside the hotel.

HOTEL SEVILLA Map p222

Trocadero No 55

The *Sevilla* (p164), one of Habana's most famous hotels, first opened as the Sevilla-Biltmore in 1908 and was embellished with tiles and stucco to resemble a Spanish-Moorish palace. Steeped in history, the hotel has boasted many famous guests over the years, including gangster Al Capone, Italian opera singer Enrico Caruso and British novelist Graham Greene (a full roll call can be found on a photo wall close to the main reception area). Greene even used the Sevilla and Room 501 (a noisy room next to the lift shaft) as a setting in his 1958 novel *Our Man in Havana*. The Sevilla's **Patio Sevillana** is a great place to come to have a snack, catch some live music and sample one of Cuba's most

famous cocktails, the Mary Pickford (rum, pineapple juice and grenadine), which was invented at the hotel's bar.

IGLESIA DEL SAGRADO CORAZÓN DE JESUS Map p222

Av Simón Bolívar btwn Gervasio & Padre Varela

Constructed between 1914 and 1923, the city's finest neo-Gothic building is an inspiring marble creation with a distinctive white steeple. The church is rightly famous for its stained-glass windows, and the light that penetrates through the eaves first thing in the morning (when the church is deserted) gives the place an almost ethereal quality. You can enjoy a few precious minutes of quiet contemplation away from the craziness of the street here.

MUSEO DE LA REVOLUCIÓN Map p222

Refugio btwn Agramonte & Av de las Misiones; unguided/guided CUC\$5/7; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun

Habana's largest and most definitive museum is housed in the former Presidential Palace, which was constructed between 1913 and 1920 and used by a string of

cash-embezzling Cuban presidents, culminating in Fulgencio Batista. The world-famous Tiffany's of New York decorated the interior, and the shimmering Salón de los Espejos (Room of Mirrors) was designed to resemble the room of the same name at the Palace of Versailles. In March 1957 the palace was the site of an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Batista led by revolutionary student leader José Echeverría.

The museum itself descends chronologically from the top floor, starting with Cuba's pre-Columbian culture and extending to the present-day Socialist regime. Much emphasis is placed on the plethora of US plots against the island, along with the various achievements of the revolution. The downstairs rooms have some interesting exhibits on the 1953 Moncada attack and the life of Che Guevara, and highlight a Cuban penchant for displaying blood-stained military uniforms. Most of the labels are in English and Spanish. In front of the building is a fragment of the former city wall, as well as an SAU-100 tank used by Castro during the 1961 Battle of the Bay of Pigs. In the space behind the museum you'll find the **Pavillón Granma**, a memorial to

CHINATOWN

While the noodles might be a little soggy and the crispy vegetables conspicuous by their absence, Habana's Chinatown – or Barrio Chino (Map p222), as it's more popularly known – provides a fascinating glimpse into the cultural makeup of a city where the term 'Far East' is more likely to mean Santiago than Shanghai.

Hired initially as contract laborers on the island's sprawling sugar plantations, the first Chinese immigrants arrived in Cuba in 1847 to fill in the gaps left by the decline of the transatlantic slave trade. By the 1880s there were over 100,000 Chinese in Spain's longstanding Caribbean colony, working in conditions little better than those of their African counterparts. But as employment contracts were opened up and business opportunities expanded, many workers laid down roots and a small Chinese community grew up on Habana's periphery.

At the advent of the 1920s, Habana's Chinatown had burgeoned into the biggest Asian neighborhood in Latin America, a booming and bustling hub of human industry that boasted its own laundries, pharmacies, theaters and grocery stores.

But the prosperity wasn't to last. By the early 1960s, Castro's ambitious nationalization plans quickly took the wind out of Chinatown's entrepreneurial sails and caused thousands of business-minded Chinese to relocate to the US. The Barrio Chino – which at its peak had stretched across 44 city blocks and published four independent newspapers – fell into a long decline, with many second- and third-generation immigrants marrying into Hispanic families – a demographic shift that left Chinese speakers numbering only in the hundreds.

Reversing the slide during the *período especial* (special period), the Cuban government – recognizing the lucrative tourist potential of Habana's ailing Chinese quarter – invested money and resources into rejuvenating the district's distinct historical character. From the mid-1990s onwards, new bilingual street signs were erected, a huge pagoda-shaped arch appeared at the entrance to Calle Dragones, and incentives were given to local Chinese businessmen in order to promote restaurants, community groups and tai chi classes.

Barrio Chino today centers on the narrow pedestrian thoroughfare of Calle Cuchillo and its surrounding streets, and the atmosphere and services have been improving by the year. Head here for cheap restaurants, plentiful food and an interesting slice of authentic Cuban life with a quirky Asian twist.

the 18m yacht that carried Fidel Castro and 81 other revolutionaries from Tuxpán, Mexico, to Cuba in December 1956. It's encased in glass and guarded 24 hours a day, presumably to stop anyone from breaking in and making off for Florida in it. The pavilion is surrounded by other vehicles associated with the revolution and is accessible from the Museo de la Revolución.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE BELLAS

ARTES Map p222

A cultural tour de force, Cuba's magnificent arts museum showcases everything from ancient Greek pots to modern Cuban pop art. Indeed, so extensive are the myriad exhibits in this fascinating collection that it takes two formidable buildings to house them.

Arranged inside the fabulously eclectic Centro Asturianas (a former Spanish social club that dates from 1927), the **Colección de Arte Universal** (☎ 863-9484; cnr Agramonte & San Rafael; adult/under 14yr CUC\$5/free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) exhibits international art from 500 BC to the present day on three separate floors. Highlights include an extensive Spanish collection (with a canvas by El Greco), some 2000-year-old Roman mosaics, Greek pots from the 5th century BC and a suitably refined Gainsborough canvas in the British Room.

The **Colección de Arte Cubano** (☎ 861-3858; Trocadero btwn Agramonte & Av de las Misiones; adult/under 14yr CUC\$5/free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) displays purely Cuban art and, if you're pressed for time, is the best one to visit. Works are displayed in chronological order starting on the 3rd floor and are surprisingly varied. Artists to look out for are Guillermo Collazo, considered to be the first truly great Cuban artist; Rafael Blanco, with his cartoonlike paintings and sketches; and Raúl Martínez, a master of 1960s Cuban pop art. Housed in a modern, spacious building dating from 1956, the highlight of this museum is the section put aside for Wifredo Lam (p31), Cuba's modern artistic genius, whose paintings evoke those of Picasso.

PARQUE CENTRAL Map p222

Paseo de Martí btwn Neptuno & San Martín

A small but scenic haven from the belching buses and roaring taxis that ply their way along Paseo de Martí, Parque Central has long been a microcosm of daily Habana

life. The park was expanded to its present size in the late 19th century after the city walls were knocked down, and the marble **statue of José Martí** at its center was the first of thousands to be erected in Cuba. Raised in 1905 on the 10th anniversary of the poet's death, the monument is ringed by 28 palm trees planted to signify Martí's birth date, January 28. Hard to miss is the group of baseball fans who linger, seemingly 24 hours a day, within ball-pitching distance of the statue's marble base at the famous **esquina caliente** (literally 'hot corner'), animatedly debating statistics, play-off predictions and the chances of US-defector Liván Hernández coming home for Christmas.

PARQUE DE ENAMORADOS Map p222

cnr Paseo de Martí & Capdevila

Preserved in 'Lover's Park,' surrounded by streams of speeding traffic, lies a surviving section of the colonial **Cárcel** (Tacán Prison), built in 1838, where many Cuban patriots, including José Martí, were imprisoned. A brutal place that sent unfortunate prisoners off to perform hard labor in the nearby San Lázaro quarry, the prison was finally demolished in 1939, and the park that took its place is dedicated to the memory of those who had suffered so horribly within its walls. Two tiny cells and an equally minute chapel are all that remain of the hated prison today. The beautiful wedding cake-like building (art nouveau with a dash of eclecticism) behind the park, flying the Spanish flag, is the old **Palacio Velasco** (1912), now the Spanish embassy.

PARQUE DE LA FRATERNIDAD Map p222

Dragones btwn Paseo de Martí & Industria

'Fraternity Park' was established in 1892 to commemorate the fourth centenary of the Spanish landing in the Americas. A few decades later, it was remodeled and renamed to mark the 1927 Pan-American Conference. The name was meant to signify American brotherhood, hence the many busts of Latin and North American leaders that have been set up around the park – including one of US president Abraham Lincoln. The ceiba tree protected by a high iron fence in the center was planted in a mixture of soil from all the countries of the Americas. Ceiba trees, the giants of jungles and savannas, have been revered as life givers throughout Latin America for centuries, from the ancient

Incas to contemporary Mayas. Followers of the Santería religion also consider the trees to be sacred, due mainly to the legacy of slaves who noted their resemblance to the African baobab. Today the park is the terminus of numerous *camello* (buses named for their two humps) routes, and is sometimes referred to as 'Jurassic Park' for the plethora of photogenic old American cars that congregate here.

REAL FÁBRICA DE TABACOS

PARTAGÁS Map p222

☎ 862-0086; **Industria No 520 btwn Barcelona & Dragones**; tours CUC\$10; 🕒 every 15min btwn 9:30-11am & 12:30-3pm Mon-Fri

One of Habana's oldest cigar factories and certainly its most famous, this neoclassical Habana landmark was founded in 1845 by a Spaniard named Jaime Partagás. Today some 400 workers toil here for up to 12 hours a day, rolling such famous cigars as Montecristos and Cohibas. As far as tours go, Partagás is the most popular and reliable factory to visit. Tour groups first check out the ground floor, where the leaves are unbundled and sorted, before proceeding to the upper floors to watch the tobacco get rolled, pressed, adorned with a band, and boxed. Though interesting in an educational sense, the tours here are often rushed and a little robotic, and some visitors find they smack of a human zoo. Still, if you have even a passing interest in tobacco, Cuban work environments or economies of scale, it's probably worth a peep.

VEDADO

Eating p118; Shopping p153; Sleeping p165; Walking Tours p102, p106

Vedado is Habana's commercial hub and much sought-after residential district. Compared to Habana Vieja, it isn't particularly old; in fact, the first houses penetrated this formerly protected forest in the 1860s, with the real growth spurt beginning in the 1920s and continuing into the 1950s.

The name Vedado derives from the Spanish verb *vedar* (to forbid); during the colonial era, the area was a forest reserve where the cutting down of trees was forbidden. This situation changed at the conclusion of the 'Spanish-American' War in 1898, when a peace treaty between Spain and the US

placed Cuba under US military occupation. With US troops in control of the island, rich and prosperous Americans flocked to Habana in their droves to invest money in sugar mills, rum factories and real estate. Many of them built their grandiose Miami-style mansions on the low hills and rocky shores of Vedado.

Laid out in a near-perfect grid, Vedado has more of a North American feel than other parts of the Cuban capital and is largely a product of the half century or so of US domination. The suburban streets are classified in a simple number and letters system à la the US while the distinctive skyline – which contains Cuba's premier clutch of *rascacielos* (skyscrapers) – draws its inspiration from the art deco giants of Miami and New York.

During the 1940s and '50s, Vedado was where Habana's prerevolutionary gambling party reached its heady climax, and its Mafia-run hotels were where most of the biggest deals were cut. The Hotel Nacional once boasted a Las Vegas-style casino, the ritzy Hotel Riviera was the former stomping ground of influential mobster Meyer Lansky, while the now defunct Hotel Capri was masterfully managed by Hollywood actor (and sometime Mob associate) George Raft. Then, in January 1959, everything went a bit awry as Fidel Castro rolled into town with his scruffy army of bearded rebels and set up shop on the 24th floor of the spanking new Havana Hilton hotel (which was promptly renamed the Hotel Habana Libre).

Today Vedado is a mostly residential neighborhood with a population of approximately 175,000, although the area still retains the Universidad de la Habana, myriad theaters and nightspots, and a plethora of decent paladares and restaurants. Unlike Centro Habana, the streets here are wide, leafy and relatively quiet while the

TRANSPORTATION

Bus Bus M-6 from Centro Habana stops at the corner of Calles 21 & L. Bus M-1 from Alamar and eastern Habana stops on the corner of Calles G and 23, and bus M-5 from western Playa stops on Calle 23 (La Rampa).

Taxi Taxis congregate outside Hotel Nacional, around the Coppelia and along the Malecón (Av de Maceo).

houses – which boast spacious lots and plenty of well-manicured gardens – have a tendency to be grander and more eclectic. The neighborhood is bisected by two wide Parisian-style boulevards, Calle G (Av de los Presidentes) and Paseo, and there is a liberal sprinkling of pleasant parks, each one filling an entire block. Locals will tell you that their beloved district is cleaner and more intimate than other parts of the city, and they're not far wrong.

Orientation

Like Centro Habana, Vedado faces the sea and is bordered to the north by the sweeping curves of the Malecón. To the east the neighborhood is marked by Calzada de Infanta and to the west by the Río Almendares. For the purposes of this book, we have extended the district south of the Calzada de Zapata to include the Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón and the Plaza de la Revolución. Southwest of here, the mainly residential neighborhood of Nuevo Vedado continues as far as the Viazul bus terminal.

BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL JOSÉ MARTÍ

Map pp224-5

Plaza de la Revolución; admission free;

☎ 8am-5:45pm

Cuba's national library is housed in a modernist tower block overlooking the Plaza de la Revolución. There is sometimes a photo exhibit in the lobby.

CASA DE LAS AMÉRICAS

Map pp224-5

☎ 55-27-06; Calle G btwn Calles 3 & 5; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun, 9am-1pm Sun

This cathedral-like art deco structure just off the Malecón on Calle G is a major cultural institution set up by Haydee Santermaría in 1959 to sponsor literary and artistic seminars, conferences and musical events (p137). It's also home to one of Cuba's largest publishing houses. Inside there's a small bookstore, as well as an art gallery and library.

VEDADO TOP FIVE

- Hotel Nacional (opposite)
- Universidad de la Habana (p89)
- Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón (p87)
- Memorial a José Martí (p86)
- Museo de Artes Decorativas (p86)

CASTILLO DEL PRÍNCIPE

Map pp224-5
cnr Calzada de Zapata & Calle G

The Castillo del Principe (1767–79) is an irregularly shaped fortress constructed to protect nearby valleys. It is said to contain moats, underground passageways, vaulted galleries, cisterns and all sorts of other intriguing stuff, but today it serves as a police headquarters and is off-limits to tourists.

COMITÉ CENTRAL DEL PARTIDO COMUNISTA DE CUBA

Map pp224-5

Plaza de la Revolución

A long, uninspiring concrete structure that glowers from behind the Martí memorial, the modern HQ of the Cuban government doesn't match the architectural splendor of the Capitolio or the Presidential Palace. This is where the affairs of the Cuban government are sorted out and where the elusive Fidel maintains an office. Not surprisingly, it's strictly out of bounds for foreigners (and most Cubans, for that matter).

COPPELIA

Map pp224-5

Calle 23 cnr Calle L; ☎ 11am-11pm

Habana's much-loved ice-cream parlor (p119) sits in the middle of a park in a building that looks more like a flying saucer than a café-restaurant. Erected in the 1960s, the Coppelia faced hard times during the *período especial* (special period), but it managed to stay open throughout the 1990s despite the rather gruesome queues.

EDIFICIO FOCSA

Map pp224-5

cnr Calles N & 19

Hard to miss on the Habana skyline, the modernist Focsa building was built between 1954 and 1956 in a record 28 months using pioneer computer technology. In 1999 it was listed as one of the seven modern engineering wonders of Cuba. With 39 floors housing 373 apartments, on its completion it was the second-largest concrete structure of its type in the world, entirely constructed without cranes. The Focsa fell on hard times in the early '90s – its upper floors became nests for vultures and in 2000 an elevator cable snapped, killing one person. Sparkling once more after a recent renovation project, this giant contains refurbished apartments and – in top-floor restaurant *La Torre* (p122) – one of the city's most celebrated eating establishments.

GRAN SYNAGOGA BET SHALOM

Map pp224-5

☎ 832-8953; Calle I btwn Calles 13 & 15;

☎ services 6pm Fri, 10.30am Sat

There are approximately 1500 Jews living in Cuba today, and about 85% of them reside in Habana. It's a far cry from the 1950s, when Habana's Jewish population peaked at around 12,000. Though never directly persecuted under the Castro regime, the island's Jews suffered the same business fall out as other Cubans and many of them left. Those who remained were similarly peeved when Israel and Cuba cut off diplomatic relations in 1973. The Gran Synagoga is one of three remaining synagogues in Habana and, although not a tourist sight in itself, its comprehensive library and friendly staff should be able to enlighten interested parties further on Cuba's fascinating Jewish history.

HOSPITAL NACIONAL HERMANOS AMEIJERAS

Map pp224-5

San Lázaro No 701

A bastion of the Cuban medical system, this 24-story hospital was completed in 1982 during Cuba's Soviet honeymoon and is the tallest occupied building in Centro Habana. One of the few post-1959 structures in this part of the city, the hospital is said to house a different specialty on every floor, and contains good facilities for treating foreigners (see p193).

HOTEL HABANA LIBRE

Map pp224-5

cnr Calles L & 23

This classic modernist hotel (p167) – the former Havana Hilton – was commandeered by Castro and his triumphant revolutionaries in 1959, just nine months after it had opened, and promptly renamed the Habana Libre. During the first few months of the revolution, Fidel effectively ruled the country from a luxurious suite on one of the upper floors.

The art here, starting with the 670-sq-m Venetian tile mural by Amelia Peláez splashed across the front of the building, is visually arresting and worth a look. Upstairs is Alfredo Sosa Bravo's *Carro de la Revolución*, made from 525 ceramic pieces, plus a rotating painting exhibit. The shopping arcade has a good liquor store and there are some great 1959 black-and-white photos of the all-conquering *barbudos* (members

of Castro's rebel army) lolling around with their guns in the hotel's lobby.

HOTEL NACIONAL

Map pp224-5
cnr Calle O & 21

Built in 1930 in an eclectic style that fused art deco with neoclassical and neocolonial elements, the *Hotel Nacional* (p167) is a national monument that – along with the Castillo de Morro – is one of the city's most recognizable 'postcard' sights. In fact, its design is an almost direct copy of the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida. Illustrious former guests include Winston Churchill, Frank Sinatra, Errol Flynn, Ernest Hemingway, Naomi Campbell...the list goes on.

The hotel's checkered history began in August 1933, when US-backed dictator Gerardo Machado was overthrown during a popular uprising, and a young army sergeant named Fulgencio Batista stepped into the presidential role. On October 2, 1933, some 300 army officers displaced by Batista's coup sought refuge in the newly opened Hotel Nacional, where the US ambassador Sumner Wells was staying. Aware that the reins of power had changed hands, Wells found urgent business elsewhere, and Batista's troops attacked the officers, many of whom were shot after surrendering.

In December 1946, the hotel gained notoriety of a different kind when it hosted the largest ever get-together of North American Mafia hoods under the guise of a Frank Sinatra concert (see The 1946 Havana Conference, p56). These days the hotel maintains a more reputable face and the once famous casino is long gone, though the *Cabaret Parisién* (p136) is still a draw. Non-guests are welcome to admire the Moorish lobby, stroll the breezy grounds overlooking the Malecón and examine the famous photos of past guests on the walls inside.

LOPEZ SERRANO BUILDING

Map pp224-5

Calle L btwn Calles 11 & 13

Resembling a miniature Empire State Building with the bottom 80 floors chopped off, the Lopez Serrano apartment building is Vedado's most distinctive art deco construction. Raised in 1932, it was the first skyscraper in a two-decade-long Habana love affair with the buildings.

THE MALECÓN

The Malecón (Av de Maceo; Map pp224-5), the evocative 8km-long sea drive that wraps its way like a weathered fortress around the choppy Straits of Florida, is one of the city's most soulful and quintessentially Cuban thoroughfares.

Long a favored meeting place for assorted lovers, philosophers, poets, traveling minstrels, fishermen and wistful Florida-gazers, the street party that is the Malecón reaches its apex at sunset when the weak yellow light from Vedado filters like a dim torch onto the buildings of Habana Centro, lending their dilapidated facades a distinctly ethereal quality.

Laid out in the early 1900s as a salubrious oceanside boulevard for Habana's pleasure-seeking middle classes, the Malecón expanded rapidly eastward in the century's first decade with a mishmash of eclectic architecture that mixed sturdy neoclassical with whimsical art nouveau. By the 1920s the road had reached the outer limits of Vedado and, by the early 1950s it had metamorphosed into a busy six-lane traffic highway that carried streams of wave-dodging Buicks and Chevrolets from the grey hulk of the Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta to the borders of the opulent diplomatic quarter.

Today, aside from being one of the world's most scenic running routes, and *the* best place on the planet to pledge undying love to your starry-eyed partner, the Malecón remains Habana's most authentic open-air theater, a place where the whole city comes to meet, greet, date and debate.

Fighting an ongoing battle with the corrosive effects of the salty ocean, which regularly sends brine-filled waves splashing like mini tsunamis over the slime-covered sea wall, many of the thoroughfare's magnificent buildings now face decrepitude, demolition or irrevocable damage. To combat the problem, 14 blocks of the Malecón have recently been given special status (despite lying outside the Unesco World Heritage site) by the City Historian's Office in an attempt to stop the rot. For the fading facades of Habana's romantic hurricane-lashed sea drive, it's a race against time.

MEMORIAL A JOSÉ MARTÍ Map pp224-5

☎ 59-23-47; Plaza de la Revolución; museum/museum & tower CUC\$3/5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat At 138.5m high, this noble monument is Habana's tallest structure and is fronted by an impressive 17m marble statue of a seated Martí in pensive *Thinker* pose, the work of artist Juan José Sicre. Constructed between 1953 and 1958 (during the Batista era) using gray marble from the Isla de la Juventud, the memorial houses a beautifully laid-out museum with access to a 129m lookout, reached via a small lift, which affords fantastic views over Habana. The museum – the definitive word on Martí in Cuba – contains handwritten letters, a host of rare photos and a brief overview of Jean Claude Forestier's grand plans for Habana's urban development.

MINISTERIO DEL INTERIOR Map pp224-5

Plaza de la Revolución

The ugly concrete block on the northern side of the Plaza de la Revolución is famous for its huge mural of Che Guevara, a copy of Alberto Korda's famous 1960 photograph, with the words *Hasta la Victoria Siempre* (Always toward Victory) emblazoned underneath. The mural was fitted in 1995 on the side wall of the Ministry of the Interior, where Che once kept an office.

MONUMENTO A JULIO ANTONIO

MELLA Map pp224-5

Calle Neptuno cnr San Lázaro

At the bottom of the university's famous *escalinata* (stairway) lies a monument to the student leader who founded the first Cuban Communist Party in 1925. In 1929, dictator Machado had Mella assassinated in Mexico City. More interesting are the black-and-white *Mella* portraits mounted in the wall in the park across San Lázaro.

MUSEO DE ARTES DECORATIVAS

Map pp224-5

☎ 830-9848; Calle 17 No 502, btwn Calles D & E; admission US\$2; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sat

This museum is slightly isolated but worth a visit. The stately mansion, completed in 1927, was formerly owned by the countess of Revilla de Camargo, and exhibits rococo, Regency, neoclassical, English, Asian and art deco styles. The rooms are filled with antique furniture, most of it European from the 18th and 19th centuries, including plenty of elegant porcelain.

MUSEO DE LA DANZA Map pp224-5

☎ 831-2198; Línea No 365 cnr Calle G; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 11am-6:30pm Tue-Sat

Four blocks from the Museo de Artes Decorativas, this place claims to be the only

museum in the Western Hemisphere devoted entirely to dance. You'll find exhibits portraying Cuban ballerinas, as well as dancers from Russia, Spain and Mexico. There are also some personal effects of Cuban ballet diva Alicia Alonso (p28). The museum is housed in a beautiful colonial-style two-story building.

MUSEO NAPOLEÓNICO Map pp224-5

☎ 879-1460; San Miguel No 1159; unguided/guided CUC\$3/5; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon Sun

There's no record of Napoleon ever visiting Cuba, although some of his more dogmatic traits may have rubbed off on the island's current leader. Perhaps that's what makes this four-story Italian-style mansion (1928) containing 7000 objects associated with the life and death of Napoleon Bonaparte so compelling. Amassed by Cuban sugar baron Julio Lobo and politician Orestes Ferrera, the collection of objects – which come mostly from Napoleon's period of exile on St Helena – includes one of several bronze Napoleonic death masks made two days after the emperor's death by his personal physician, Dr Francisco Antommarchi, who later lived in Cuba. Other highlights include sketches of Voltaire, paintings of the battle of Waterloo, china, furniture, and an interesting re-creation of Napoleon's study and bedroom.

NECRÓPOLIS CRISTÓBAL COLÓN

Map pp224-5

cnr Calzada de Zapata & Calle 12; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm

Cuba's largest cemetery is famous the world over for its stunning sculptures and decorative mausoleums. Covering 56 hectares the graveyard is the final resting place for over a million souls, though people are being disinterred daily due to lack of space. Laid out like a mini city in the 1860s and '70s, the cemetery's graves read like a who's who of Cuban history, and a visit here justifies a walking tour in its own right (p106).

PARQUE ALMENDARES Map pp224-5

cnr Calles 47 & 49C

Running along the banks of the Río Almendares below the bridge on Calle 23 (La Rampa), this wonderful oasis of greenery

and negative-air ions in the heart of chaotic Habana is sometimes referred to as the lungs of the city. The park was restored in 2003 and a beautiful job has been done: benches line the river promenade, plants grow profusely in the shade and there are many facilities here, including an antiquated **miniature golf course**, the **Anfiteatro Parque Almendares** (p139) and a children's **playground**. There are also several good places to eat. Take a 20-minute stroll through old-growth trees in the **Bosque de la Habana** and you'll feel transported (take a friend, though: this is a very isolated spot and is considered unsafe by locals).

PARQUE LENNON Map pp224-5

Calle 17 btwn Calles 6 & 8

It may come as a surprise to some, but there are only three statues of Lenin in Habana: **Colina Lenin** (p94), one in suburban **Parque Lenin** (p96), and one (by deftly swiveling a couple of letters in the surname) in this peaceful urban space set in a pleasant corner of Vedado. The hyper-realistic bronze statue of ex-Beatle John (as opposed to Vladimir) Lennon was unveiled by Fidel Castro in December 2000 on the 20th anniversary of the singer's death. Culturally speaking, it was one of the Cuban leader's more remarkable policy U-turns, as the Beatles' music had been banned in Cuba in the 1960s for being too 'decadent.' But following Lennon's strong social activism and opposition to US involvement in the Vietnam War, he quickly became a hero among Cuban music fans, causing Castro to quickly rebrand him as a 'revolutionary.' The 21st-century reincarnation of Lennon in bronze has suffered the ignominy of having his glasses stolen on a number of occasions and a guard has now been employed to keep a regular watch.

PLAZA DE LA REVOLUCIÓN Map pp224-5

Conceived by French urbanist Jean Claude Forestier in the 1920s, this gigantic modern urban space was part of Habana's 'new city,' which grew up in the 1920s, '30s, '40s and '50s. As the nexus point of Forestier's ambitious plan, the square was built on a small hill (the Loma de los Catalanes) in the manner of Paris' Place de Charles de Gaulle, with various avenues fanning out toward the Río Almendares, Vedado and the Parque de la Fraternidad.

Surrounded by modern office buildings constructed in the late 1950s (the original plan took 30 years to reach fruition), the square today is the base of the Cuban government and its ministries, and a place where large-scale political rallies are held (including lengthy speeches by Fidel Castro). In January 1998, close to one million people (nearly 10 percent of the Cuban population) crammed into the square to hear Pope John Paul II say Mass.

Grey, utilitarian and rather ugly, the plaza on a cloudy day has a barren and rather officious feel. When the sun's out, on the other hand, it's famously hot. Small on beauty but big on grandiosity, it's a regular stop for the ubiquitous tour buses that dispatch crowds of camera-clutching tourists who make a beeline for the famous Che Guevara mural (p86).

QUINTA DE LOS MOLINOS Map pp224-5 cnr Av Salvador Allende & Luaces

The former residence of General Máximo Gómez, hero of the independence wars, this building and its extensive grounds is a now museum that was undergoing a lengthy restoration at the time of writing. The house is surrounded by what were once Habana University's botanical gardens. It also houses La Madriguera (p140), the headquarters of the Asociación Hermanos Saíz, the youth arm of Uneac.

REAL FÁBRICA DE TABACOS H UPMANN Map pp224-5

☎ 862-0081; Calle 23 btwn Calles 14 & 16; tours CUC\$10; 🕒 9:30am-2:30pm Mon-Fri
Upmann's cigars are legendary in Cuba and have been produced in the country since 1844, when two German bankers and avid cigar smokers, Hermann and August Upmann, bought a factory in Habana. Indeed, the popular Petit Upmann brand was a longtime favorite of US president John F Kennedy. Currently one of only two cigar factories offering tours in Habana, the grand neoclassical Upmann building is a little out of the way and generally only accepts organized groups. Inquire first at Real Fabrica de Tabacos Partagás (p83) or at your hotel travel desk rather than turn up here in person.

TEATRO NACIONAL DE CUBA Map pp224-5

☎ 879-6011; cnr Paseo & Calle 39
Cuba's national theater (p132) doesn't quite live up to the grandiosity of the Gran Teatro, and its removed position in the Plaza de la Revolución is a little inconvenient for nighttime shows. The theater opened on March 16, 1960, with the show *The Respectful Hooker*, with its famous author Jean-Paul Sartre in attendance. Among a host of cultural activities staged here are jazz, theater

and ballet festivals. There's also a popular dance club, the *Café Cantante Mi Habana* (p140), and a piano bar, the *Piano Bar Delirio Habanero* (p139), on the premises.

TORREÓN DE SAN LÁZARO Map pp224-5 cnr Malecón & Vapor

This tiny watchtower was built by the Spanish in the 18th century. Like La Chorrera, the San Lázaro tower quickly fell to British troops during the invasion of 1762. You can admire it from the outside only.

TORREÓN DE SANTA DOROTEA DE LA CHORRERA Map pp224-5

Malecón btwn Calles 18 & 20; 🕒 noon-2am
One of a number of small battlements that once guarded Habana from pirates and warships, this small two-story tower at the mouth of Río Almendares contained sentry posts, artillery emplacements, storage rooms and a military barracks. Records indicate that it rarely housed more than 100 troops. The tower was designed by Italian engineer Juan Bautista Antonelli – who also designed a similar tower in Cojimar, east of town – and was completed during the administration of Álvaro de Luna y Sarmiento. In 1762 the tower was taken by the British prior to their attack on the Castillo de los Tres Santos Reyes Magnos del Morro. Today it houses a small restaurant, *Mesón la Chorrera* (p120).

UNIVERSIDAD DE LA HABANA Map pp224-5

cnr Neptuno & San Lázaro
Founded by Dominican monks in 1728 and secularized in 1842, Habana University began life in Habana Vieja before moving to its present site in 1902. The existing neoclassical complex dates from the second quarter of the 20th century, and today some 30,000 students (2000 of them foreigners), taught by 1700 professors, follow courses in the social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, mathematics and economics here.

Perched on a hill at the top of the famous stairway, the university's central quadrangle, the Plaza Ignacio Agramonte, displays a tank captured by Castro's rebels in 1958. Directly in front is the *biblioteca* (library) and to the left the Edificio Felipe Poey, with two unusual museums. The *Museo de Historia Natural* (admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-4pm

Mon-Fri Sep-Jul), downstairs, is Cuba's oldest museum, founded in 1874 by the Academia de Ciencias Médicas, Físicas y Naturales. Many of the stuffed specimens of Cuban flora and fauna date from the 19th century. Upstairs is the *Museo Antropológico Montané* (admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jul), established in 1903, with a rich collection of pre-Columbian artifacts. The most important objects are the wooden 10th-century *Ídolo del Tobaco*, discovered in Guantánamo province, and the stone *Ídolo de Bayamo*. The exhibits are color coded to indicate the three periods of Indo-American civilization in Cuba: Pre-Ceramic (red), Proto-Ceramic (green) and Ceramic (yellow).

US INTERESTS OFFICE Map pp224-5 Calzada btwn Calles L & M

Set up in 1977 during a brief thaw in Cuban-American relations under President Jimmy Carter, the US Interests Office remains a huge source of controversy between the two countries, with the Cubans accusing its US neighbor of sponsoring all kinds of political dissent across the island from behind its heavily guarded doors. Surrounded by billboards displaying hysterical graffiti that liken George W Bush to Adolf Hitler, the building is the site of some of the worst tit-for-tat finger wagging on the island. Facing the office on the Malecón is the *Plaza Tribuna Anti-Imperialista*, built during the Elián González affair to host major in-your-face protests (earning it the local nickname 'Protestódromo'). Seventy-three somber flags currently fly here in honor of the 73 Cubans killed in a 1976 plane bomb in the Bahamas. The main perpetrator, Luís Posada Carriles, is currently residing in the US.

PLAYA & MARIANAO

Eating p122; Shopping p154; Sleeping p168
The municipality of Playa, west of Vedado across the Río Almendares, is a paradoxical mix of prestigious residential streets and tough proletarian housing schemes. There are a handful of worthwhile sights here, including a top-notch aquarium and one of the city's most idiosyncratic yet fascinating museums, the *Fundación Naturaleza y El Hombre*. The district also boasts a spanking new trade center and a burgeoning strip of high-class hotels.

VOICES OF HABANA: ANY GARCÍA VIERA

Sales and promotions, Vedado

Sum up Habana in one sentence. Crowded, colorful and full of life. **What defines a habanero?** A *habanero* [inhabitant of Habana] is a person who is proud to be from Habana; they will go out of their way to boast about it. **How has Habana changed in the last 10 years?** There's more renovation in the historical center. **What are the hottest sounds in Habana right now? Where can you hear them?** *Trova* [traditional poetic singing] is ever popular, with artists such as Silvio Rodríguez and pop-fusion duo Buena Fe. Also reggae fusion with Alfonso X, who has played at open-air venues such as Parque Lennon. Other good places to catch live music are the Casa de la Música and the Jazz Café. **How do you get about the city?** I use my car – a 1974 Russian Lada. **How can the inquisitive traveler find the 'real' Cuba?** Centro Habana is a good slice of typical Habana life. Look around El Prado [Paseo de Martí] and also Parque Central and you'll see different people talking about different things – especially baseball. The Malecón [Av de Maceo] is busiest after midnight and is most popular with the young. **What is the best thing about your neighborhood?** The view of the ocean over the Malecón from my window. **Is the food here so terrible?** It's not caviar, but it's not terrible. Try going to an agropecuario [free-enterprise vegetable market] or a local inexpensive paladar [privately run restaurant] such as Los Amigos in Vedado.

As related to Brendan Sainsbury

TRANSPORTATION

Bus Bus M-5 from Vedado stops along Calle 41 and carries on through Marianao to Cubanacán; bus 132 goes from the corner of Dragones and Industria, beside the Capitolio in Centro Habana, to the same destination.

Taxi You can get a Taxi OK taxi on Calle 8 between Av 1 and 3, or you can hail a taxi along Av 5 or outside Miramar Trade Center (Av 3 between Calles 78 and 84).

Gracious Miramar is the municipality's leafiest quarter, a neighborhood of broad avenues and weeping fig trees where the traffic moves sedately and diplomats' wives – clad in sun visors and Lycra leggings – go for gentle afternoon jogs along Av Quinta. Many of Habana's foreign embassies are housed here in old prerevolution mansions, and business travelers and conference attendees flock here from around the globe to make use of some of Cuba's grandest and most luxurious facilities. If you're interested primarily in sightseeing and entertainment, commuting to Vedado or Habana Vieja is a nuisance and an expense. However, some of the best salsa clubs, discos and restaurants are out this way, and the *casas particulares* (private houses that let out rooms to foreigners) are positively luxurious.

Cubanacán plays host to many of Habana's business and scientific fairs and conventions, and it is also where several specialized medical institutes are situated. Despite the austerity of the *período especial*, vast resources have been plowed into biotechnological and pharmaceutical research institutes in this area. Yachties, anglers and scuba divers will find themselves using the Marina Hemingway (p185) at Playa's west end. Marianao is world famous for the Tropicana Nightclub, but locally it's known as a tough, in parts rough, neighborhood with a powerful Santería community and a long history of social commitment.

Orientation

Playa is a large, sprawling urban area that is bordered in the east by the Río Almendares and to the north by the Straits of Florida. Subdistricts from east to west include the embassy district of Miramar, Buena Vista, Cubanacán, Siboney, Flores, Barlovento (where Marina Hemingway is

situated) and Santa Fe. Marianao is a tougher working-class neighborhood to the south that stretches as far as the Autopista Nacional.

PLAYA & MIRAMAR

ACUARIO NACIONAL Map pp228-9

☎ 202-5872; cnr Av 3 & Calle 62; adult/child CUC\$5/4; 🕒 10am-10pm Tue-Sun

A Habana institution founded in 1960, the aquarium gets legions of annual visitors, particularly since its 2002 revamp. Environmentally speaking, the place leaves all other Cuban aquariums in the shade (although that isn't saying much). For a start, it's designed to be both educational and conservationist. Saltwater fish are the specialty, but there are also sea lions, dolphins and lots of running-around room for kids. Dolphin performances are almost hourly from 11am, with the final show at 9pm; admission includes the show. There's also a decent restaurant here.

FUNDACIÓN NATURALEZA Y EL HOMBRE

Map pp228-9

☎ 204-0438; Av 5B No 6611 btwn Calles 66 & 70; admission CUC\$3; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri

This museum collects artifacts from a 17,422km canoe trip from the Amazon source to the sea led by Cuban intellectual and nature-lover Antonio Nuñez Jiménez. The canoe in which they made the trip is displayed, along with headdresses, weapons and adornments used by the indigenous communities the team encountered along the way, plus scores of ceramic figurines in all stages and positions of sexual arousal – the Latin American Kamasutra. The *fundación* (foundation) itself is mind-blowing, with one of Cuba's largest photography collections, plus all the titles written by Nuñez Jiménez, (he was damn prolific!), the famous Fidel portrait by Guayasamín, stalactites in the foyer and glass cases collecting all kinds of intriguing ephemera from the founder's life. Though small, the museum is one of Habana's most rewarding.

IGLESIA JESÚS DE MIRAMAR

Map pp228-9

cnr Av 5 & Calle 82

It's difficult to miss the domed roof of this gigantic neo-Romanesque church, an architectural rarity in Habana. Despite its

eye-catching facade the church, which dates from the 20th century, has little historic significance.

PABELLÓN PARA LA MAQUETA DE LA CAPITAL

Map pp228-9

☎ 202-7303; Calle 28 No 113 btwn Avs 1 & 3; admission CUC\$3; 🕒 9:30am-5:15pm Tue-Sat If you thought the Maqueta de la Habana Vieja (p73) was impressive, check out this ultramodern pavilion containing a huge 1:1000 scale model of the whole city, originally created for urban-planning purposes but now a tourist attraction in its own right. Measuring 22m long and 8m wide, it's one of the largest scale models in the world. You can rent binoculars to check out all the color-coded buildings, parks and monuments.

RUSSIAN EMBASSY

Map pp228-9

Av 5 No 6402, btwn Calles 62 & 66

The strikingly ugly Russian embassy sticks out like a sore thumb in the graceful avenues of Playa and Miramar, casting its dark Stalinist shadow over an otherwise quiet and attractive neighborhood. With its imposing double tower visible for miles around, this monstrous structure is testament to the once weighty influence of Cuba's superpower patron on the island.

MARIANAO, CUBANACÁN & FLORES

CENTRO DE INGENERÍA GENÉTICA Y BIOTECNOLOGÍA

Map pp228-9

☎ 271-8008; www.cigb.edu.cu; cnr Av 31

& Calle 190
The ultramodern Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología, 1km south of the Palacio de las Convenciones, is the focus of Cuba's genetic engineering and biotechnology research. Cuba first became involved in biotechnology in 1981, and this center opened in 1986 after an initial investment of US\$140 million. Since then, the 400 Cuban scientists employed in this enormous complex have developed a number of unique methods of medical treatment and several new vaccines. It's the largest of its kind in Latin America. Visits can be made by prior arrangement.

CENTRO NACIONAL DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS

Map pp228-9

☎ 208 2553; www.cnic.edu.cu; cnr Av 25 & Calle 158

Two blocks away is the Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas, where the anticholesterol wonder drug Ateromixol, or PPG, was created. This remarkable work has been conducted without foreign assistance, and it possibly holds the key to a world-class pharmaceutical industry of the future. Visits can be made by prior arrangement.

CLUB HABANA

Map pp228-9

☎ 204-5700; Av 5 btwn 188 & 192; daily pass CUC\$20

This fabulously eclectic mansion in Flores dating from 1928 once housed the Havana Biltmore Yacht & Country Club. In the 1950s the establishment gained brief notoriety when it famously denied entry to Cuban president Fulgencio Batista on the grounds that he was 'Black' (Batista was in fact of mixed blood with a Black mother and a part-Chinese father). Castro had better luck when he dropped by for dinner some 30 years later and the club remains one of the few places where he has dined in public. These days the history of the establishment seems to have swung full circle and it is again a popular hangout for foreign correspondents and diplomats. The club has its own beach, swimming pool, tennis courts, bar, boutiques and health club. Annual membership is CUC\$1500, but should you wish to hobnob spontaneously with the high and mighty, you can get a daily pass for CUC\$20.

INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE ARTE

Map pp228-9

ISA; Calle 120 No 1110

Cuba's leading art academy was established here in the former Habana Country Club in 1961, and elevated to the status of institute in 1976. The Faculty of Music occupies the original country-club building, and after the revolution a number of other facilities were erected on the site of former 18-hole championship golf course. This cluster of buildings, some unfinished, some half-restored, but all gloriously graceful due to the arches, domes and profuse use of red brick, was the brainchild of Che

Guevara and a team of architects. Among them was Richard Porro, who designed the striking Faculty of Plastic Arts, with long curving passageways and domed halls in the shape of a reclining woman. Across a small stream from the main building is the Faculty of Theater & Dance. There are some 800 students; it is also possible for foreigners to study (p191) here. It is accessible only from the northwest.

MUSEO DE LA ALFABETIZACIÓN

Map pp228-9

☎ 260-8054; Ciudad Libertad; admission free;

🕒 8am-noon & 1-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat

The former Cuartel Colombia military airfield at Marianao is now a school complex called Ciudad Libertad. You may enter to visit the Museo de la Alfabetización, which describes the 1961 literacy campaign, where 100,000 *brigadistas* (student volunteers) aged 12 to 18 spread out across Cuba to teach reading and writing to farmers, workers and the aged. In the center of the traffic circle, opposite the entrance to the complex, is a tower in the form of a syringe in memory of Carlos Juan Finlay, who discovered the cause of yellow fever in 1881.

MUSEO DEL AIRE

Map pp228-9

Calle 212 btwn Avs 29 & 31, La Coronela; unguided/guided CUC\$2/3; camera CUC\$2; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue-Sun

The substantial Museo del Aire has 22 planes and helicopters on display, most of them ex-military aircraft. Don't miss Che Guevara's personal Cessna 310, or the space suit used by Cuba's first cosmonaut.

PABEXPO

Map pp228-9

☎ 271-6614; Av 17 btwn Calles 174 & 184

Opened in 1987, Pabexpo is a 20,000-sq-m exhibition space housed in four interconnecting pavilions that are filled with about 15 business or scientific shows a year. Events include tourism fairs, cigar festivals and music awards. The excellent restaurant El Palenque (p123) is situated nearby.

PALACIO DE LAS CONVENCIONES

Map pp228-9

Calle 146 btwn Avs 11 & 13

The Habana Convention Center is one of Cuba's most dramatic modern buildings. Built for the Nonaligned Conference in

1979, the four interconnecting halls contain an auditorium with 2101 seats, and there are also 11 smaller halls. The 589-member National Assembly meets here twice a year.

EASTERN HABANA

Eating p126; Sleeping p170

East of Habana harbor the city mixes historic 17th- and 18th-century forts with the grittier working-class neighborhoods of Regla and Guanabacoa. Further afield lie newer developments strung out around the Estadio Panamericano, and further still is the small fishing village of Cojimar.

Despite their relative isolation on the other side of the harbor channel, Habana's eastern forts, referred to collectively as the Parque Histórico Militar Morro-Cabaña, are linked to Habana Vieja via a traffic tunnel and share Unesco World Heritage site status. They're a must-see for anyone with a passing interest in Habana's history.

Further south, the old neighborhood of Regla, just across the harbor from Habana Vieja, is an industrial port town known as a center of Afro-Cuban religions, including the all-male secret society Abakúa. Long before the triumph of the 1959 revolution, Regla was heralded as the Sierra Chiquita ("Little Sierra," after the Sierra Maestra) for its revolutionary traditions. Free of the standard tourist trappings, Regla makes a nice afternoon out of the city; the skyline views from this side of the harbor offer an entirely different perspective on the Cuban capital.

Three kilometers to the east is Guanabacoa, a town founded in 1607 that later went on to become a center of the slave trade. In 1762 the British occupied Guanabacoa on their way through to Habana, but not without a fight from its mayor, José Antonio Gómez Bulones (better known as Pepe Antonio), who attained almost legendary status by conducting a guerrilla campaign behind British lines. Guanabacoa today is a sleepy yet colorful place that feels more like a small town than a sprawling city suburb. There are no hotels here, and access on public transportation is not easy, but a visit is worthwhile if tied in with an excursion to nearby Regla, which is easily accessible by ferry.

Ten kilometers east of Habana is the little port town of Cojimar, famous for harboring Ernest Hemingway's fishing boat *El Pilar* in the 1940s and '50s; it was also (supposedly)

TRANSPORTATION

Bus For Cojimar, the Habana Vieja–Playas del Este bus 400 and the Vedado–Alamar M-1 stop on the Via Monumental near the Estadio Panamericano. Bus M-3 runs from the Terminal de Omnibus to Alamar, and stops on the Via Blanca near Regla. Bus 3 from Parque de la Fraternidad in Centro Habana, and buses 195 and 295 from Vedado all go to Guanabacoa.

Ferry Ferries leave from the Muelle Luz in Habana Vieja every 15 minutes, and dock in Regla and Casablanca.

Taxi The best place to find a cab is outside the Hotel Panamericano near Cojimar, or along the Via Monumental.

Train The *Hershey Train* leaves Casablanca five times daily and stops in Guanabacoa.

the prototype for the fishing village in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Founded in the 17th century at the mouth of a river, Cojimar was where the invading British army landed in 1762 en route to Habana. In 1994, thousands of *balseros* (rafters) split from the village's sheltered but rocky bay, lured to Florida by US radio broadcasts and promises of political asylum.

Orientation

Eastern Habana comprises all the neighborhoods east of the harbor channel and the Bahía de la Habana. These include Casablanca and the eastern forts (technically part of the Unesco World Heritage site) immediately across the water; Regla, another harborside settlement further south; and Guanabacoa, a suburb set further inland and separated from Regla by the arterial Via Blanca. Further east lies the Estadio Panamericano complex and the adjacent seaside village of Cojimar, which faces the Boca de Cojimar. Across the bay and delineated by the Río Cojimar lie the modern working-class high-rises of Alamar.

CASABLANCA

CASTILLO DE LOS TRES SANTOS

REYES MAGNOS DEL MORRO

Map p227

☎ 863-7941; Parque Histórico Militar Morro-Cabaña; admission CUC\$4; 🕒 8am-8pm

This imposing castle was erected between 1589 and 1630 to protect the entrance to Habana harbor from pirates such as

Frenchman Jacques de Sores, who had sacked the city in 1555 (the Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta across the harbor was constructed at approximately the same time). Perched high on a rocky bluff above the ebbing Atlantic, the fort – with its irregular polygon shape, 10ft-thick walls and deep protective moat – is a classic example of Renaissance military architecture. Built by African slaves who hacked the foundations straight out of the surrounding rock, El Morro served as Habana's leading line of defense until the completion of the neighboring Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña in 1774. For more than a century, the fort withstood numerous attacks by French, Dutch and English privateers. But in 1762, after a bloody siege that lasted 44 days, a British force led by Admiral George Peacock consisting of 173 ships and 14,000 men captured El Morro by attacking from the landward side and digging a tunnel under the walls. The famous lighthouse (admission CUC\$2; 🕒 8am-8pm) – which has made the castle one of Habana's signature sights – was added in 1844.

Renovated in the 1980s, the fort is now open to the public and is ever popular on the tour bus circuit. Aside from the fantastic views over sea and city, El Morro also hosts a maritime museum, covered by the entrance fee.

FORTALEZA DE SAN CARLOS DE LA CABAÑA

Map p227

☎ 862-0617; Parque Histórico Militar Morro-Cabaña; admission before/after 6pm CUC\$4/6, guide CUC\$1; 🕒 8am-11pm

An 18th-century colossus, the Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña was built between 1763 and 1774 on a long, exposed ridge on the east side of Habana harbor to fill a weakness in the city's defenses. In 1762 the British had taken Habana by gaining control of this strategically important ridge and it was from here that they shelled the city mercilessly into submission. In order to prevent a repeat performance, the Spanish king Charles III ordered the construction of a massive fort that would repel future invaders. Measuring 700m from end to end and covering a whopping 10 hectares, it is the largest Spanish colonial fortress in the Americas.

Not surprisingly, the fort was so awesome that no one ever dared to attack it, though during the 19th century Cuban

patriots faced firing squads here. Dictators Machado and Batista used the fortress as a military prison, and immediately after the revolution Che Guevara set up his headquarters inside to preside over another catalogue of grisly executions (this time of Batista's officers).

These days the fort has been restored for visitors and you can spend at least half a day checking out the wealth of attractions here. As well as bars, restaurants, souvenir stalls and a cigar shop (containing the world's longest cigar), La Cabaña boasts the Museo Fortificaciones y Armas and the Museo de Comandancia de Che, both covered by the entrance fee. The nightly *cañonazo* at 8:30pm is a popular evening excursion (p66).

ESTATUA DE CRISTO Map p230

This white-marble statue of Christ that dominates the Bahía de la Habana (Habana Bay) was created in 1958 by J Madera. It was allegedly promised to President Batista by his wife after the US-backed dictator had survived an attempt on his life in the Presidential Palace in March 1957. As you disembark the Casablanca ferry, follow the road uphill for about 10 minutes until you reach the statue. The views from up here are stupendous, and it is a favorite nighttime hangout for locals. Behind the statue is the Observatorio Nacional (closed to tourists).

REGLA

COLINA LENIN Map p230 cnr Calle 24 de Febrero & Lenin

About 1.5km from the ferry you'll see a high metal stairway that gives access to one of only two monuments in Habana to Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, better known to his friends and enemies as Lenin. Conceived in 1924 (before onetime Soviet stooge Fidel Castro was even born) by the Socialist mayor of Regla, Antonio Borsch, the monument was created to honor Lenin's death, and was one of the first of its kind outside the USSR. Above the monolithic image of Lenin is an olive tree planted by Bosch surrounded by seven lithe figures; unlike many other Soviet-inspired monuments you'll find in Cuba, this one creates hope. A small exhibition on the history of Colina Lenin is in a pavilion on the back side of the hill (it's often closed).

IGLESIA DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE REGLA Map p230

☎ 97-62-88; cnr Santuario & Calle Martí;
🕒 7:30am-6pm

As important as it is diminutive, this church, which lies just behind the boat dock in the municipality of Regla, has a long and colorful history. Inside on the main altar you'll find La Santísima Virgen de Regla, a Black Madonna venerated in the Catholic faith and associated in the Santería religion with Yemayá, the *orisha* of the ocean and the patron of sailors (always represented in blue). Legend claims that this image was carved by St Augustine 'the African' in the 5th century, and that in the year AD 453 a disciple brought the statue to Spain to safeguard it from barbarians. The small vessel in which the image was traveling survived a storm in the Strait of Gibraltar, so the figure was recognized as the patron of sailors. These days, *balseiros* attempting to reach the US also evoke the protection of the Black Virgin.

A hut was first built on this site in 1687 by a pilgrim named Manuel Antonio to shelter a copy of the image, but this structure was destroyed during a hurricane in 1692. A few years later a Spaniard named Juan de Conyedo built a stronger chapel and in 1714 Nuestra Señora de Regla was proclaimed patron of the Bahía de la Habana. In 1957 the image was crowned by the Cuban cardinal in Habana cathedral. Every year on September 8, thousands of pilgrims descend on Regla to celebrate the saint's day and the image is taken out for a procession through the streets.

The current church dates from the early 19th century and it is always busy with both Catholic and Santería devotees from both religions stooping in silent prayer before the images of the saints that fill the alcoves. In Habana, there is probably no better (public) place to see the layering and transference between Catholic beliefs and African traditions.

MUSEO MUNICIPAL DE REGLA

Map p230

☎ 97-69-89; Martí No 158; admission CUC\$2;
🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun

If you've come across to see the church, you'd do well to check out this quirky

museum that is spread over two sites, one on the corner of Santuario and Calle Martí (adjacent to the church), and the other (better half) a couple of blocks straight up the main street from the ferry. Recording the history of Regla and its Afro-Cuban religions, the museum has an interesting, small exhibit on Remigio Herrero, first *babalawo* (Santería priest) of Regla, and a bizarre statue of Napoleon with his nose missing. An Observatorio Astronómico was established in the museum building in 1921. Price of admission includes both museum outposts and the Colina Lenin exhibition (opposite).

GUANABACOA

IGLESIA DE GUANABACOA Map p231

Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción; cnr Pepe Antonio & Adolfo del Castillo Cadenas

Guanabacoa's main church, on Parque Martí in the center of town, was designed by Lorenzo Camacho, and built between 1721 and 1748. The gilded main altar and nine lateral altars are worth a look, and there's a painting of the Assumption of the Virgin at the back. Notice the Moorish-influenced wooden ceiling. The main doors are usually closed, but you can try asking at the parochial office on the back side of the church.

MUSEO DE MÁRTIRES Map p231

Martí No 320; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm
Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun

Effectively an arm of Guanabacoa's municipal museum, this place is on the road to Regla and displays material relevant to the Cuban revolution. Pop in only if you're passing.

MUSEO MUNICIPAL DE GUANABACOA Map p231

☎ 97-91-17; Martí No 108; admission CUC\$2;
🕒 10am-6pm Mon, Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun

Two blocks west of Parque Martí, Guanabacoa's small museum is the neighborhood's most interesting draw card. Founded in 1964, it tracks the development of the neighborhood throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and is famous for its rooms on Afro-Cuban culture, slavery and Santería, with a particular focus on the *orisha* Elegguá.

COJÍMAR

BUST OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Map p231

Calle 1D Final

Next to the Torreón de Cojimar and framed by a neoclassical archway is a gilded bust of Ernest Hemingway erected by the residents of Cojimar in 1962. Hemingway came here regularly in the 1940s and '50s and moored his boat in the nearby harbor. His friend and sea captain, Gregorio Fuentes, lived in the green-and-white house at Calle 98 until 2002, when he died aged 101.

TORREÓN DE COJÍMAR Map p231

Calle 1C Final

Overlooking the harbor, this old Spanish fort dating from 1649 is presently occupied by the Cuban coast guard. It was the first fortification taken by the British when they attacked Habana from the rear in 1762.

OUTER HABANA

Outer Habana is a caustic mix of sprawling suburbs and small colonial towns – most of them engaging, but all frustratingly difficult to get to without using your own transportation.

Parque Lenin, located off the Calzada de Bejucal in Arroyo Naranjo, 20km south of central Habana, is the city's largest recreational area. Constructed between 1969 and 1972 on the orders of Castro's muse Célia Sánchez, it is one of the few developments in Habana from this era. The 670 hectares of green parkland and beautiful old trees surround an artificial lake, the Embalse Paso Sequito, situated just west of the much larger Embalse Ejército Rebelde, which was formed by damming the Río Almendares.

Although the park itself is attractive enough, the mishmash of facilities inside has fallen on hard times since the onset of the *período especial*. Taxi drivers will wax nostalgic about when Parque Lenin was an idyllic weekend getaway for scores of pleasure-seeking Habana families; these days the place has more of a neglected and surreal air. Fortunately, help is on the way. New management and millions of pesos of Chinese investment is currently financing

TRANSPORTATION

Bus Bus M-7 goes from the Parque de la Fraternidad in Centro Habana to Santa María del Rosario and San Francisco de Paula; bus M-2 goes from the same place to Santiago de las Vegas. Bus 88 from Vibora and bus 113 from Marianao go right through Parque Lenin. **Taxi** Taxis cost CUC\$15 to Parque Lenin and CUC\$20 to Santiago de las Vegas.

of a major renovation project to bring the park back to its former glory.

Santa María del Rosario, 19km southeast of central Habana, is an old colonial town founded in 1732. Unlike most other towns from that period it has not become engulfed in modern suburbs, but stands alone in the countryside. The charms of this area were recognized by one of Cuba's greatest living painters, Manuel Mendive, who selected it for his personal residence. You can also see the countryside of this area in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's metaphorical critique of slavery in his movie *La Última Cena* (The Last Supper).

In 1940 Ernest Hemingway bought a villa called Finca Vigía on a hill at San Francisco de Paula, 15km southeast of central Habana. He lived and wrote at the property until 1960, a year before his death. Recently reopened after a lengthy renovation, the Museo Hemingway is must-see for all literary fans.

PARQUE LENIN AREA

EXPOCUBA Map p232

Carretera del Rocío; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Sun

A visit to Parque Lenin can easily be combined with a trip to ExpoCuba, 3km south of Las Ruinas restaurant. Opened in 1989, this large permanent exhibition showcases Cuba's economic and scientific achievements in 25 pavilions based on themes such as sugar, farming, agriculture, animal science, fishing, construction, food, geology, sports and defense. Despite the hype ExpoCuba is poorly maintained and replete with government propaganda. The bulk of its clientele are schoolchildren (who come under duress) and Cubans who flock to the amusement park at the center of the complex. Don't make a special trip.

JARDÍN BOTÁNICO NACIONAL

Map p232

☎ 54-93-65; **Carretera del Rocío; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Wed-Sun**

Directly across the highway from ExpoCuba is the 600-hectare Jardín Botánico Nacional, a surprisingly extensive collection of trees, plants and flowers from around the world. Highlights include the **Pabellones de Exposición** (opened in 1987), a series of greenhouses with cacti and plants native to Cuba, as well as the harmonious **Japanese Garden**, which was the brainchild of Japanese designer Yoshikuni Arake in 1992. This portion of the National Botanical Garden was a gift from Japan's government in 1989 as a token of friendship to the people of Cuba. As the gardens are rather large, a tractor train around the park departs four times a day and costs CUC\$3. You can also join ecotourists for an organic, vegetarian buffet lunch in **Restaurante El Bambú** (p127) for CUC\$15. Gaviota runs **tours** (p67) to the gardens.

PARQUE LENIN Map p232

Sights in Parque Lenin are scattered around and in dire need of a face-lift. Aside from horseback riding (p146) and a new **amusement park** for kids currently being rebuilt with Chinese money, there's an **aquarium** (admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) with freshwater fish and crocodiles, a dramatic white **monument to Lenin**, a smaller bronze **monument to Celia Sánchez** (Castro's onetime muse who was largely responsible for having the park built), and the scruffy-looking **Rodeo Nacional**, which has sporadic rodeo events. Nestled near the lake is the **Galería de Arte Amelia Peláez** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10am-5pm). However, the park's best feature is undoubtedly the expansive open spaces that are enjoyed so enthusiastically by Cuban families at weekends during the summer.

PARQUE ZOOLOGICO NACIONAL

Map p232

Av Zoo-Lenin; adult/child CUC\$3/2, vehicle incl occupants CUC\$5; ☎ 9am-3:15pm Wed-Sun

The extensive Parque Zoológico Nacional is 2km west of Parque Lenin. Worlds away from the inner-city zoo in Nuevo Vedado, with its stagnant crocodile ponds and jail cells for cages, this is more of a zoo-cum-

safari-park where rhinos, hippos and other imported fauna have free rein. A trolley bus tours the grounds all day (included in admission).

SANTUARIO DE SAN LÁZARO

Map pp218-19

El Rincón; ☎ 7am-6pm

The object of one of Cuba's most important pilgrimages, this small, sparkling church in the village of El Rincón just outside Santiago de las Vegas is the venerated shrine of San Lázaro, a Christian saint known for his ministrations to lepers and the poor. Every year on December 17 (Saint Lazarus' feast day), thousands of Cubans descend on the sanctuary en masse, some on bloodied knees, others walking barefoot for kilometers through the night to exorcise evil spirits and pay off debts for miracles granted. San Lázaro is paralleled in Santería by the *orisha* Babalú Ayé, the Yoruba god of sickness. A statue of the saint made of wood with gold and marble finishes stands on the church's main altar, and the shrine is busy year-round with people laying flowers and making donations.

SAN FRANCISCO DE PAULA & SANTA MARÍA DEL ROSARIO

IGLESIA DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DEL ROSARIO Map pp218-19

Catedral de los Campos de Cuba, Santa María del Rosario; ☎ 5:30-7:30pm

This church on Santa María del Rosario's old town square was built in 1720 near the

Quiebra Hacha sugar mill, of which nothing remains today. Inside are a gilded mahogany altar and a painting by Veronese. It's one of suburban Habana's most attractive secrets.

MUSEO HEMINGWAY Map pp218-19

☎ 91-08-09; **San Francisco de Paula, Carretera Central Km 12.5; unguided/guided CUC\$3/4, camera/**

video CUC\$5/25; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Wed-Mon

Recently reopened after a lengthy renovation, this unique museum in the Finca Vigía, set in the quiet Habana suburb of San Francisco de Paula, is the most interesting stop on the Cuban Ernest Hemingway trail. Having stayed on and off in the Hotel Ambos Mundos for nearly a decade, Hemingway finally bought the Finca Vigía in 1940 and lived here permanently until 1960. The house sits on a lush hilltop 11km southeast of Habana Vieja with gorgeous views over the city. Although visitors are not allowed in the house (which has been left as it was the day Hemingway departed), there are enough open doors and windows to allow an interesting glimpse into Papa's universe. Inside there are books everywhere (including beside the toilet), a large Victrola and record collection, wall-mounted animal heads, a gun collection and an astounding number of knickknacks. A stroll through the garden is worthwhile to see the surprisingly sentimental dog cemetery, Hemingway's fishing boat *El Pilar* and the pool where actress Ava Gardner once swam naked. If you're tired, you can chill out on a chaise longue below whispering palms and bamboo.

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