

Sleeping ■

Habana Vieja	158
Centro Habana	162
Vedado	165
Playa & Marianao	168
Eastern Habana	170

Sleeping

Habana offers foreign visitors two distinctly different accommodation options. Firstly there are government-run hotels, which vary in standard and price from the basic to the resplendent. Secondly there are privately operated *casas particulares* (p160), family homes where the owners are permitted to let out up to two rooms a night to foreigners. Casa prices in Habana start at around CUC\$20 a night and rarely exceed CUC\$35.

Compared to other Latin American cities, Habana suffers from a dearth of good budget hotels, though in most cases the similarly priced *casas* provide a perfectly adequate substitute. At the opposite end of the scale, the city has some truly amazing colonial hotels, most of them housed in meticulously restored historic buildings in Habana Vieja and run by the government agency Habaguanex.

The best city hotel base is undoubtedly Habana Vieja, where the bulk of the cafés, bars, museums and tourist sights are located. Another excellent option is the adjacent district of Centro Habana. Vedado has its own sights and nightlife, but these are rather spread out and detached from the historical core, while Playa and Marianao are well over 8km from the main action.

PRICE GUIDE

The price symbols in this chapter indicate the price for a double room in the low season.

\$\$\$	over CUC\$130 a night
\$\$	CUC\$60-130 a night
\$	under CUC\$60 a night

HABANA VIEJA

Habana Vieja's specialty is restored period hotels and staying in one of these magnificent establishments can be a memorable, if expensive, treat.

There are, however, a few considerations worth taking into account before booking a room in this area. Firstly Habana Vieja is a highly condensed urban neighborhood that squeezes over 70,000 people into an area of just 4.5 sq km. While parts of the quarter might resemble a living museum, noise, grime and dilapidated tenements are all part of the neighborhood's colorful package. Don't expect desertlike tranquility and don't be surprised if the local salsa band carries on playing until well after midnight.

Secondly this is Cuba, a country that is emerging tentatively from a lengthy and austere *periodo especial* (special period), and goods are rationed and shortages are still a part of everyday life. However plush your fancy colonial hotel might appear on the outside, you can pretty much assume that it's unlikely to have the water pressure of Cancun or the food quality of New York. What it *will* have, though, is bags of atmosphere and a tangible sense of living history.

RESIDENCIA ACADÉMICA CONVENTO DE SANTA CLARA

Map p220 Hostel \$
☎ 866-9327; Cuba btwn Sol & Luz; r per person CUC\$25

An unbelievable bargain situated right in the heart of Habana Vieja, this unique place offering just nine rooms in a former convent (p73) fills up quickly. Renowned among backpackers as an alternative *casa particular*, the quirky and central old-town building is both spacious and safe, and retains bags of original atmosphere. Some of the rooms are dorm style, holding up to six beds.

MESÓN DE LA FLOTA

Map p220 Period Hotel \$
Habaguanex; ☎ 863-3838; Mercaderes No 257 btwn Amargura & Brasil; s/d CUC\$45/65; ☎ Habana Vieja's smallest and most reasonably priced period hotel is an old Spanish tavern decked out in maritime motifs and located within spitting distance of gracious Plaza Vieja. Five individually crafted rooms contain all of the modern comforts and amenities, while downstairs a busy restaurant (p114) serves up delicious *tapas* and scrumptiously prepared *platos principales*

(main dishes). For music lovers the real draw card, however, is the nightly *flamenco* (p131), the quality of which could rival anything in Andalucía. Sit back and soak up the intangible spirit of the dance.

HOSTAL BELTRÁN DE LA SANTA CRUZ

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$
Habaguanex; ☎ 860-8330; San Ignacio No 411 btwn Muralla & Sol; s/d low season CUC\$70/110, high season CUC\$80/130; ☎ Habana Vieja's smallest and most reasonably priced period hotel is an old Spanish tavern decked out in maritime motifs and located within spitting distance of gracious Plaza Vieja. Five individually crafted rooms contain all of the modern comforts and amenities, while downstairs a busy restaurant (p114) serves up delicious *tapas* and scrumptiously prepared *platos principales*

HOSTAL DEL TEJADILLO

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$
Habaguanex; ☎ 863-7283; Tejadillo No 12; s/d low season CUC\$70/110, high season CUC\$80/130; ☎ You can't get much closer to luscious Plaza de Catedral than the Tejadillo. Restored in 2000, this hotel-cum-inn situated in an old colonial house just one block north of Habana's most atmospheric square is a great base from which to explore the secret nooks and crannies of dreamy Habana Vieja. It's slightly cheaper than its Habaguanex competitors, and 17 of the 32 rooms have kitchenettes, though some rooms facing away from the street are windowless. However, nothing can take away from the peaceful ambience of the hotel's two inner patios and fantastic location.

HOSTAL VALENCIA

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$
Habaguanex; ☎ 867-1037; Oficios No 53; s/d low season CUC\$70/110, high season CUC\$80/130; ☎ The Valencia resembles a 17th-century Spanish coach house with its hanging

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

TOP FIVE SLEEPS

- Hostal Conde de Villanueva (below)
- Hotel Raquel (p161)
- Hotel Sevilla (p164)
- Hotel Nacional (p167)
- Hotel Meliá Habana (p170)

vines, huge doorways (and rooms) and a renowned *paella* restaurant (p115); one half expects Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to come wandering down the staircase. Slap bang in the middle of the historical core and with a price that makes it one of the cheaper offerings in the current Habaguanex stable, the Valencia is an excellent choice, with good service and plenty of atmosphere. Next door is the similarly historic Hotel El Comendador (Habaguanex; ☎ 867-1037; Obrapia No 55; s/d low season CUC\$70/110, high season CUC\$80/130).

HOTEL LOS FRAILES

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$
Habaguanex; ☎ 862-9383; Brasil No 8 btwn Oficios & Mercaderes; s/d low season CUC\$70/110, high season CUC\$80/130; ☎ This engaging 22-room hotel just off Plaza Vieja sports a tranquil inner courtyard where staff bustle to and fro dressed as monks. Stained-glass windows and rough-hewn furniture add an extra monastic feel. Upstairs, away from the solemnity, comfortable rooms are distinguished by good art, tasteful furniture and bright modern fittings; the four rooms with balconies are the best. An added perk is the resident woodwind quartet in the lobby; the musicians are so good that they regularly lure in bebies of passing tour groups for impromptu concerts.

HOSTAL CONDE DE VILLANUEVA

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$
Habaguanex; ☎ 862-9293; Mercaderes No 202; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; ☎ If you're going to splash out on one night of luxury in Habana, you'd do well to check out this highly lauded colonial gem. Restored under the watchful eye of city historian Eusebio Leal a few years back, the Hostal Conde de Villanueva has converted a grandiose city mansion into an intimate

CASAS PARTICULARES

Want to get the local take on baseball? Need some help with your faltering Spanish? Dying to fathom out the subtleties of Habana's effervescent nightlife? It's simple: look no further than your trusty casa particular, Cuba's unique variation on the family-run guesthouse and the best – some would say the *only* – way of getting underneath the skin of this complex yet seductive city.

Legalized in 1996 as part of the economic reforms ushered in by the *periodo especial* (special period), casas particulares are private houses that let out rooms to foreigners at refreshingly affordable rates. In order to qualify, casa owners must first pay a set monthly tax to the Cuban government and conform to a certain set of rules and regulations (only two rooms are allowed per house and only two adults are allowed per room).

Thanks to regular inspections by government officials, legal casas particulares are – almost without exception – clean, homely and remarkably well run. Other advantages are their prices (rarely more than CUC\$35 a night), their ubiquity (there are literally thousands in Habana alone) and the fact that, by staying in one, you are putting money directly into the pockets of hard-working and often hard-up Cubans.

Not surprisingly, casas come in all shapes and sizes, from resplendent colonial villas to modest downtown apartments with shared bathrooms. Sometimes you'll have to step over the family dog to get to your bedroom, while at others you'll enjoy your own private entrance and a room full of antique furniture.

If you're stumped for choice, it's easy to shop around for a casa in Habana by looking for the small blue-and-white sign that all legal houses display on their front door. Alternatively you can try prebooking using www.cubacasas.net or www.casaparticular.org.

See opposite for casas particulares in Habana Vieja, p163 for casas in Centro Habana, p166 for casas in Vedado, and p169 for casas in Playa and Marianao.

and thoughtfully decorated hotel, with nine bedrooms spread spaciouly around an attractive inner courtyard (complete with resident peacock). Opening onto the cobbled streets below, the upstairs rooms contain stained-glass windows, chandeliers, arty sculptures, huge bathrooms and – best of all – a fully working whirlpool bath. After a few weeks in the Cuban outback, it could be just what the doctor ordered.

HOSTAL PALACIO O'FARRILL

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 860-5080; Cuba No 102-108 btwn Chacón & Tejadillo; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; 📞 📍

One of Habaguanex' – and Habana's – most impressive hotels, the Palacio O'Farrill is a staggeringly beautiful neoclassical palace that once belonged to Don Ricardo O'Farrill, a Cuban sugar entrepreneur who was descended from a family of Irish nobility. Taking the verdant Emerald Isle as its theme, much of the interior decor has been painted green, giving the plant-filled courtyard and reception areas a soothingly shady feel. Rooms are large, with satellite TV and air-con, and – if not quite in the luxury bracket – are furnished in an authentic Spanish colonial style. The hotel's communal areas are equally attractive, with a patio, a fountain, antique furnishings

and a well-positioned terrace; there's even 24-hour internet and up-to-date business facilities.

HOSTAL SAN MIGUEL

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 862-7656; cnr Cuba & Peña Pobre; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; 📞 📍

Located close to the harbor with tremendous views out across the water to Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña, the elegant San Miguel was once owned by Cuban newspaper magnate Antonio San Miguel y Segalá, whose periodical *La Lucha* played an important role in the 1895 War of Independence. Characterized by high ceilings, Carrera marble floors and a plethora of faded prerevolution photos, the San Miguel's 10 individually decorated rooms retain a rather fetching old-world feel that blends in perfectly with the building's neoclassical belle époque decor. A very pleasant old-town retreat.

HOTEL AMBOS MUNDOS

Map p220 Hotel \$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 860-9529; Obispo No 153; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; 📞 📍

Hemingway's Habana hideout and the place where he is said to have penned

his guerrilla classic *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Castro's bedtime reading during the war in the mountains), the pastel pink *Ambos Mundos* (p71) is a Habana institution and a obligatory stop for anyone on a tour of 'Hemingway-once-fell-over-here' bars. Small, sometimes windowless, rooms suggest overpricing, but the lobby bar is classic enough (follow the sound of the romantic piano melody) and a drink on the rooftop terrace is one of the city's finest treats.

HOTEL ARMADORES DE SANTANDER

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 862-8080; San Pedro No 4; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; 📞 📍

This charming maritime-themed hotel situated next to Habana's famous port once housed the offices of a Spanish shipbuilding company (the name means 'Ship Owners from Santander'). The initials JC carved above the door pay homage to the building's original proprietor, José Cabrero Mier, who oversaw fleets of ships that transported goods and troops between Habana and Spain. The modern-day hotel has been renovated with plenty of architectural flourishes (check out the ornate ceiling in the lobby), and a number of the 39 rooms are split-level with an interconnecting spiral staircase. Other bonuses include a terrace bar, harbor-facing balconies and an

atmospheric lobby furnished with a clutch of old-fashioned leather couches. The location by the docks isn't Habana's prettiest, but it doesn't lack authenticity.

HOTEL FLORIDA Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 862-4127; Obispo No 252; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; 📞 📍

They don't make them like this anymore. Built in 1836, the Florida is an architectural extravaganza built in the purest colonial style, with arches and pillars clustered around a central courtyard loaded with atmosphere. Habaguanex has restored the building with loving attention to detail, and the amply furnished rooms have retained their original high ceilings and wonderfully luxurious finishes. Complemented by an elegant café and an amiable **bar-nightspot** (🍷 from 8pm), this colonial jewel should be checked out by anyone with even a passing interest in Cuba's architectural heritage.

HOTEL RAQUEL

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 860-8280; cnr Amargura & San Ignacio; s/d low season CUC\$105/180, high season CUC\$115/200; 📞 📍

Encased in a dazzling 1908 palace (that was once a bank), the painstakingly restored Hotel Raquel takes your breath away with

HABANA VIEJA CASAS PARTICULARES

Noemi Moreno (Map p220; ☎ 862-3809; Apt 2, Cuba No 611 btwn Luz & Santa Clara; r CUC\$25) A simple, clean room in great location behind convent; there are also rooms in Apartment 1.

Ramón & Maritza (Map p220; ☎ 862-3303; Luz No 115 btwn San Ignacio & Inquisidor; r CUC\$25) Two big interconnecting rooms in colonial house; friendly owners.

Migdalia Carraballe (Map p220; ☎ /fax 861-7352; Santa Clara No 164 btwn Cuba & San Ignacio; r CUC\$25-35) Two rooms with balconies overlooking the Iglesia y Convento de Santa Clara.

Casa de Pepe & Rafaela (Map p220; ☎ 862-9877; San Ignacio No 454 btwn Sol & Santa Clara; r CUC\$30) One of Habana's best casas particulares – there are antiques and Moorish tiles throughout, three rooms with balconies and gorgeous new bathrooms, and an excellent location. The owners' son also rents rooms in a charming colonial house at San Ignacio No 656 (r CUC\$25).

Eliberto Barrios Suárez (Map p220; ☎ 863-3782; eliberto62@webcorreosdecuba.cu; Apt 3A, San Juan Díos No 112 btwn Aguacate & Compostela; apt US\$30) A nice two-bedroom duplex apartment with kitchen.

Pablo Rodríguez (Map p220; ☎ 861-2111; pablo@sercomar.telemar.cu; Compostela No 532 btwn Brasil & Muralla; r CUC\$30) An old colonial house with original frescoes. Pablo rents two rooms with bathroom, fan and fridge.

Juan & Margarita (Map p220; ☎ 867-9592; Apt 8, Obispo No 522 btwn Bernaza & Villegas; apt CUC\$60) A super-central two-bedroom apartment with flexible and friendly hosts. Juan speaks excellent English and has a lot of local knowledge.

its grandiose columns, sleek marble statues and intricate stained-glass ceiling. Replete with intricate art nouveau flourishes, the reception area in this marvelous eclectic building is a tourist sight in its own right. Architecture aside, the rooms here are well presented, if a little noisy, and the rooftop bar (with an adjacent cupola) is a great place to sink a cold beer while overlooking the urban bustle of Habana Vieja. Other pluses include a small gym-sauna, friendly staff and a great central location.

HOTEL SANTA ISABEL

Map p220 Period Hotel \$\$\$
Habaguanex; ☎ 860-8201; Baratillo No 9; s/d CUC\$190/240; 🚻 🚰

Considered to be one of Habana's finest hotels – as well as being one of its oldest (it first began operations in 1867) – the Hotel Santa Isabel, on the east side of the Plaza de Armas, is housed in the **Palacio de los Condes de Santovenia** (p76), the former palace of a decadent Spanish count. In 1998 this three-story baroque beauty was upgraded to five-star status but, unlike other posh Cuban hotels, it actually comes close to justifying the billing. The 17 regular rooms have oodles of historic charm, and are all kitted out with attractive Spanish colonial furniture and paintings by contemporary Cuban artists. No wonder ex-US president Jimmy Carter stayed here during his landmark visit in 2002.

CENTRO HABANA

Centro Habana contains a convenient mix of historic hotels and cheap reliable staples, plus a couple of international-class gems thrown in for good measure. Geographically speaking, many of the better options are clustered in or around Parque Central, including the Inglaterra (the city's oldest hotel), the NH Parque Central (one of its swankiest) and the Saratoga (one of its newest). West of Paseo de Martí (Prado) you'll find a handful of more basic options, such as the Lido, the Caribbean, the Deauville and the Lincoln.

Centro Habana has a plethora of *casas particulares* (opposite), offering far more variety and choice than Habana Vieja. Be careful when searching the streets west of Paseo de Martí with a suitcase or rucksack in tow; daylight robbery (in the form of bag snatching) is not unheard of in this area.

CASA DEL CIENTÍFICO

Map p222 Hotel \$
 ☎ 862-1607, 862-1608; Paseo de Martí No 212; s/d with shared bathroom CUC\$25/31, with private bathroom CUC\$45/55; 🚻 🚰

Eclectic meets eccentric in this eye-catching palace that was once the residence of Cuba's second president. These days the hotel's grand stairways, hidden courtyards and withered terraces maintain a slightly more abandoned air (expect the odd cobweb and a good coating of dust) but, with its central location and time-warp prerevolutionary atmosphere, it makes an evocative introduction to Habana. The rooms are ordinary but adequate, and there's a rather becoming **restaurant** (🍴 6pm-midnight) on the 1st floor. This is also a great place to catch vivid snippets of local Habana life; check out the kids who play baseball against the side wall on Trocadero.

HOTEL LIDO Hotel \$

Map p222
Islazul; ☎ 867-1102; Consulado No 210; s/d low season CUC\$25/36, high season CUC\$36/40; 🚻 Squeezed into scruffy Calle Consulado, the easy-on-the-wallet Lido is a budget travelers' mecca. The secret lies in a strangely unexotic mix of location, price and the friendly, no-nonsense service offered up by the staff behind reception. Unlike other cheap establishments in Habana, the Lido – rather refreshingly – has no pretensions. The rooms might be a little cell-like and the showers intermittently cold, but for CUC\$25 a night in the low season you're getting good security, a prime location and basic but clean rooms (all have satellite TV and air-con) for less than the price of an average *casa particular*. It's about the closest thing Habana gets to a backpackers hostel.

HOTEL LINCOLN Hotel \$

Map p222
Islazul; ☎ 862-8261; Virtudes No 164; s/d low season CUC\$30/40, high season CUC\$39/46; 🚻 A peeling nine-story giant on a corner of busy Av de Italia (Galiano), the Hotel Lincoln was the second-tallest building in Habana when it was built in 1926. Over-shadowed by taller opposition these days, the hotel still offers 135 air-con rooms with TV in an atmosphere that is more 1950s than 2000s. Notoriety hit this hotel in 1958 when the M-26-7 (26th of July Movement; Fidel Castro's revolutionary organiza-

CENTRO HABANA CASAS PARTICULARES

Juan Carlos (Map p222; ☎ 863-6301, 861-8003; Crespo No 107 btwn Colón & Trocadero; r CUC\$15-20) A big, spotless house with natural light throughout. The cheapest room has a shared bathroom. Good value.

Julio & Elsa Roque (Map p222; ☎ 861-8027; julioeroq@yahoo.com; Apt 2, Consulado No 162 btwn Colón & Trocadero; r CUC\$15-25) Julio and Elsa rent two rooms with different amenities; the cheaper room has shared bathroom, fan only and cold water. Both Julio and Elsa are superhelpful and mines of information. English spoken.

Dulce Hostel (Map p222; ☎ 863-2506; Amistad No 220 btwn Neptuno & San Miguel; r CUC\$20) A beautiful colonial house with tile floors and soaring ceilings; Dulce María González is a quiet, friendly hostess.

Martha Obregón (Map p222; ☎ 870-2095; marthaobregon@yahoo.com; upper apt, Gervasio No 308 btwn Neptuno & San Miguel; r CUC\$20-25) The little balconies at this nice home have small street views. It's popular and often full.

Niurka O Rey (Map p222; ☎ 863-0278; Aguila No 206 btwn Animas & Virtudes; r CUC\$20-25) A sparkling blue house with a slightly less sparkling but adequate interior. There's one room with a bathroom, and parking is close by.

Alejandro Osés (Map p222; ☎ 863-7359; 1st fl, Malecón No 163; r CUC\$25) This popular place has two rooms and sea views. English spoken.

Amada Pérez Güelmes & Antonio Clavero (Map p222; ☎ 862-3924; upper apt, Lealtad No 262 btwn Neptuno & Concordia; r CUC\$25) Two rooms are available in this pleasant colonial house.

Carlos Luis Valerrama Moré (Map p222; ☎ 867-9842; 2nd fl, Neptuno No 404 btwn San Nicolás & Manrique; r CUC\$25) A big space with living-cum-dining-room and balcony.

Elicio Fernández (Map p222; ☎ 861-7447; Apt 405, Aguila No 314 btwn Neptuno & Concordia; r UC\$25) Breezy rooms with fan, shared bathroom and lots of natural light. The building has a doorman and elevator, and rooftop views.

Esther Cardoso (Map p222; ☎ 862-0401; esthercv2551@clubarte.cult.cu; Aguila No 367 btwn Neptuno & San Miguel; r CUC\$25) This artist's palace is like an oasis in the desert with tasteful decor, funky posters, spick-and-span bathrooms and a spectacular roof terrace. Book early.

La Casona Colonial (Map p222; ☎ 870-0489; cubarooms2000@yahoo.com; Gervasio No 209 btwn Concordia & Virtudes; r CUC\$25) Jorge Diaz has several rooms around nice courtyard; one has three beds with a shared bathroom. It's good for longer stays.

Rufino Añel Martín & Pilar Rodríguez Santos (Map p222; ☎ 862-4149; Neptuno No 556 btwn Lealtad & Escobar; r CUC\$25) Located in a lively, edgy area. The helpful hosts can cook and do laundry.

Paraiso Vista al Mar (Map p222; ☎ 861-8112; 14th fl, Malecón No 51 btwn Carcel & Genios; r CUC\$30) If it's a view you're after and you don't mind traveling up 14 floors in an antiquated elevator, check out this spacious option right run by Tamara Valdés.

Triny Vital (Map p222; ☎ 867-9132; lower apt, Calle Aguila No 118 btwn Colón & Trocadero; apt CUC\$50) A two-bedroom independent apartment with kitchen that sleeps four to five.

tion) kidnapped five-time motor-racing world champion Carlos Fangio from the downstairs lobby on the eve of the Cuban Grand Prix. A small 'museum' on the 8th floor records the event for posterity. Otherwise the hotel is friendly but timeworn.

HOTEL CARIBBEAN Hotel \$

Map p222
Islazul; ☎ 860-8233; Paseo de Martí No 164 btwn Colón & Refugio; s/d low season CUC\$36/48, high season CUC\$41/54; 🚻 Cheap but not always so cheerful, the Caribbean – which was the recipient of a long-awaited 2006 makeover – offers aspiring

Cuban renovators a lesson in how *not* to decorate. Dark, poky rooms contain basic facilities such as shower, TV and air-con, but it's all a bit rough around the edges and the price – while competitive – isn't justified by the facilities. Budget travelers should try the Lido around the corner first.

HOTEL PARK VIEW Hotel \$

Map p222
Habaguanex; ☎ 861-3293; cnr Colón & Morro; s/d low season CUC\$52/76, high season CUC\$52/86; 🚻 🚰 Built in 1928 with American money, the Park View's reputation as the poor man's

Sevilla isn't entirely justified. Its location alone (within baseball-pitching distance of the Museo de la Revolución) is enough to consider this mint green city charmer a viable option. Chuck in clean rooms, modern furnishings (the hotel was renovated in 2002 by Habaguanex) and a small but perfectly poised 7th-floor restaurant (☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) and you've got yourself a veritable bargain. Other bonuses include cable TV, friendly doormen and a 24-hour downstairs bar.

HOTEL DEAUVILLE Map p222 Hotel \$\$

Hotetur; ☎ 866-8812; cnr Av de Italia & Malecón; s/d/tr CUC\$61/88/99; ☺ ☑
The Deauville is housed in a kitschy sea-front high-rise that sharp-eyed Habana-watchers will recognize from picturesque Malecón-at-sunset postcards. But while the location might be picture-perfect, the facilities inside this former Mafia gambling den don't quite match up to the stellar views. Currently reborn in peach and red, and already showing the effects of the corrosive sea water, the Deauville has handy facilities and a reasonably priced restaurant that is popular with the mid-priced tour-circuit crowd. It's great for an early-morning Malecón (Av de Maceo) stroll.

HOTEL PLAZA Map p222 Hotel \$\$

Gran Caribe; ☎ 860-8592; Agramonte No 267; s/d CUC\$80/120; ☺ ☑
The Plaza has the potential to be an illustrious frontrunner on the hotel scene, but rather like the photogenic Buicks that chug asthmatically around the streets outside, its elegant facade is only half the story. Erected in 1908, this hotel sports the restaurant *Los Portales* (p116), tiled marble floors and a rather fancy lobby. But step upstairs to one of the 188 rooms and, more often than not, you'll find damp bedding, windows that don't open properly and curtains hanging off the railings. A cheaper hotel could get away with it, but this place has delusions of grandeur.

HOTEL TELÉGRAFO Map p222 Hotel \$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 861-1010, 861-4741; Paseo de Martí No 408; s/d low season CUC\$80/130, high season CUC\$95/160; ☺ ☑
A bold royal-blue charmer, this Habaguanex beauty juxtaposes old-style archi-

tectural features (the original building hails from 1888) with futuristic design flourishes that include silver sofas, a huge winding central staircase and an awesome tile mosaic emblazoned on the wall of the downstairs café. The rooms are equally spiffy.

HOTEL INGLATERRA

Map p222 Hotel \$\$
Gran Caribe; ☎ 860-8595; Paseo de Martí No 416; s/d/tr CUC\$84/120/168; ☺ ☑
Back in the 1890s, this was José Martí's Habana hotel of choice and it's still playing on the fact – which says something about the current state of affairs. The Inglaterra (p80) is a better place to hang out than actually book a room, with its exquisite Moorish lobby and crusty colonial interior easily outshining the lackluster and often viewless rooms. The rooftop bar is a popular watering hole and the downstairs foyer is a hive of bustling activity; there's also a downstairs alfresco bar, *El Louvre* (☺ 11am-midnight). Beware of the streets outside, which are full of overzealous hustlers.

HOTEL SEVILLA Map p222 Hotel \$\$\$

Gran Caribe; ☎ 860-8560; Trocadero No 55 btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte; s/d CUC\$151/206; ☺ ☑ ☑
Al Capone once hired out the whole 6th floor, Graham Greene used it as a setting for his novel *Our Man in Havana* and the Mafia used it as an operations centre for its narcotics racket; refurbished by the French Sofitel group in 2002, the Hotel Sevilla now sparkles like the colonial jewel of old, with spacious rooms, comfortable beds and a rather surreally located ground-floor swimming pool (bathers are overlooked by a crumbling tenement, complete with lines of drying washing). The hotel's high point (in more ways than one) has to be the superb 9th-floor restaurant (☺ from 7pm), where you can enjoy dinner overlooking the muggy streets of Habana Vieja. A violinist serenades diners with a wonderfully melancholic rendition of 'As Time Goes By.'

HOTEL NH PARQUE CENTRAL

Map p222 International Hotel \$\$\$
Cubanacán; ☎ 860-6627; Neptuno btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte; s/d CUC\$205/270; ☺ ☑ ☑
If you have a penchant for hanging out in expensive five-star hotel lobbies sipping end-

less cups of coffee, the Parque Central could be just the place for you. Outside of the two Meliás, this is without a doubt Habana's best international-standard hotel, with professional service and stellar business facilities on a par with top-ranking five-star hotels elsewhere in the Caribbean. Although the sumptuous lobby and well-furnished rooms may lack the historical riches of the old town's venerable Habaguanex establishments, the ambience here is far from antiseptic. Bonus facilities include a full-service business center, a rooftop pool-fitness-center-Jacuzzi, an elegant lobby bar, a celebrated restaurant, and excellent international telephone and internet links. Two of the bedrooms are wheelchair accessible. At the time of writing, the Parque Central was in the process of constructing a large new wing on Calle Virtudes directly behind the existing building.

HOTEL SARATOGA Map p222 Hotel \$\$\$

Habaguanex; ☎ 868-1000; Paseo de Martí No 603; r patio/street view CUC\$240/290; ☺ ☑ ☑
One of Habana's newest, ritziest and most dramatic hotels, the glittering Saratoga is an architectural work of art that sits pretty on the intersection of Paseo de Martí and Dragones, with fantastic views over toward the Capitolio. Sharp, if officious, service predominates here, and highlights include the extracomfortable beds, power showers and a truly decadent rooftop swimming pool. But not surprisingly, there's a price for all this luxury. The Saratoga is Habana's most expensive hotel and, while its facilities impress, its service can't quite match up to that of the marginally cheaper Meliás.

VEDADO

Most of Vedado's grandiose hotels were built with Mafia money in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, when Habana rocked to the all-night parties of influential American mobsters such as Meyer Lansky and Salvatore 'Lucky' Luciano. But, while the casinos might have long since shut up shop and the Mob beat a hasty retreat back to Miami and New York, Vedado's once opulent accommodation options still offer guests a hint or two of their former prerevolutionary greatness.

An expansive selection of casas particulares also punctuates the leafy avenues and quiet side streets of Habana's most salubrious neighborhood.

HOTEL BRUZÓN Map pp224-5 Hotel \$
Islazul; ☎ 877-5684; Bruzón No 217 btwn Pzoz Dulces & Av de la Independencia; s/d CUC\$22/28
Closed for renovations at the time of writing, the jaded Bruzón has long been overdue for a facelift. Formerly the one and only reason to stay at this tatty Islazul establishment was its proximity to the Astro bus station; it'll need to do something drastic in order to attract anyone other than rock-bottom budget hunters in the future.

HOTEL COLINA Map pp224-5 Hotel \$

Islazul; ☎ 33-40-71; fax 33-41-04; cnr Calles L & 27; s/d low season CUC\$40/50, high season CUC\$46/60; ☺
The coziest and friendliest of Vedado's cheaper accommodation options, the Colina has 80 basic rooms with air-con, satellite TV and intermittent hot water, plus there's a good people-watching sidewalk café just off the reception. Though not exactly luxurious, it's cheaper and better value than the Vedado or St John's hotels nearby.

HOTEL EL BOSQUE

Map pp224-5 Hotel \$\$
Gaviota; ☎ 204-9232; Parque Almendares, Calle 28A btwn Avs 49A & 49B; s/d CUC\$45/60; ☺ ☑
Cheap and grossly underrated, the Hotel El Bosque is the better and less costly arm of the Gaviota-run Kohly-Bosque *complejo* (complex). Clean, friendly and genteel, the hotel lies on the banks of the Río Almendares, and is a good (and rare) midrange choice in this neck of the woods. The 54 rooms are small but functional, there's 24-hour internet, and a pleasant terrace out back overlooks the wooded slopes of the nearby river. The Gaviota shuttle bus whisks guests into central Habana four times a day for CUC\$5.

HOTEL ST JOHN'S

Map pp224-5 Hotel \$\$
Gran Caribe; ☎ 33-37-40; Calle O No 216 btwn Calles 23 & 25; s/d low season CUC\$50/67, high season CUC\$56/80; ☺ ☑
A fair to middling Vedado option, Hotel St John's has a rooftop pool, clean bathrooms, reasonable beds and the ever popular nightclub *Pico Blanco* (p141), if wall vibrating Cuban discos are your thing. On the negative side,

VEDADO CASAS PARTICULARES

Angela Muñoz Rubio (Map pp224-5; ☎ 879-6851; San Miguel No 1116 btwn Mazón & Basarrate; r CUC\$25) Rents rooms near Museo Napoleónico; two have private bathrooms.

Basilia Pérez Castro (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-3953; bpcdt@hotmail.com; Apt 7, lower fl, Calle 25 No 361 btwn Calles K & L; r CUC\$25) Two rooms with independent entrances, fridge, phone and TV. A mellow, good-value place.

Guillermina & Roberto Abreu (Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-6401; Apt 13A, Paseo No 126 btwn 5 & Calzada; r CUC\$25) Two spacious rooms with views. Elevator.

Maribel & Luis Garcé (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-1619; Calle 19 No 356 upstairs btwn Calles G & H; r CUC\$25) This nice young couple rent a smallish room with a little balcony.

Natalia Rodes (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-8909; Apt 11B, 11th fl, Calle 19 No 376 btwn Calles G & H; r CUC\$25) Shared bathroom, nice bed, expansive views.

Nelsy Alemán Machado (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-8467; Apt 1, Calle 25 No 361 btwn Calles K & L; r CUC\$25) An independent, laidback place with fridge.

Pilar Palma (Map pp224-5; ☎ 831-8918; Apt 9, Calle 0 No 202 btwn Calles 23 & 25; r CUC\$25) Prime location near Calle 23 (La Rampa); friendly owner.

Armando Gutiérrez (Map pp224-5; ☎ /fax 832-1876; Apt 7, Calle 21 No 62 btwn Calles M & N; r CUC\$25-30) This friendly place has a nice room with balcony and fridge. English spoken. Elevator.

Beatriz & Julio (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-5778; Calle 25 No 367 btwn Calles K & L; r CUC\$25-30; 🚻) Close to university and central hotels. It has a separate entrance.

Melba Piñeda Bermudez (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-5929; lienafp@yahoo.com; Calle 11 No 802 btwn Calles 2 & 4; r CUC\$25-30) A sweet room with nice furnishings and a private terrace in a beautiful colonial home on a quiet street. Helpful owners.

Eddy Gutiérrez Bouza (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-5207; Calle 21 No 408 btwn Calles F & G; r CUC\$30; 🚻) A huge colonial house with fantastic host who is an excellent source of information about Habana.

Julio Padilla Martín (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-5709; juliop_martin@hotmail.com; Apt 7B, Calle K No 210 btwn Línea & 15; r CUC\$30-35) Good for groups. English is spoken.

Manuel Martínez (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-6713; Apt 22, Calle 21 No 4 btwn Calles N & O; r CUC\$30-35) There are 10 to 12 casas particulares in this magnificent art deco building constructed in 1945. This one overlooks the gardens of the Hotel Nacional; it's a classic view.

Marta Vitorte (Map pp224-5; ☎ 885-7792; martavitorte@hotmail.com; Apt 14, Calle G No 301 btwn 13 & 15; r CUC\$35-40) Two rooms in a deluxe apartment with phenomenal views, great beds and a wraparound terrace. English spoken.

the staff here are sometimes unresponsive, the breakfast is mediocre and there's none of the exotic colonial atmosphere that you get in Habana Vieja. Ask for a west-facing room for a killer view over the Malecón.

HOTEL VEDADO Map pp224-5 **Hotel \$\$**
Gran Caribe; ☎ 836-4072; Calle 0 No 244 btwn Calles 23 & 25; s/d low season CUC\$50/67, high season CUC\$56/80; 🚻 📺 📺

The eight-story Hotel Vedado is sprawled across two buildings in tatty Calle O and falls into the midrange price bracket. However, despite the presence of a swimming pool, a gym and a nightly cabaret show, something about this place doesn't quite hit the spot.

Maybe it's the stropky, uninterested staff behind reception (you don't feel so much a guest here as a number), or the rather uninspiring rooms, or the disorganized and overcrowded lobby – all of which would be semiacceptable in a cheaper place but here just seem, well, substandard. At this price you're better off treating yourself to a night in Habana Vieja.

HOTEL VICTORIA Map pp224-5 **Hotel \$\$**
Gran Caribe; ☎ 833-3510; cnr Calles M & 19; s/d low season CUC\$55/70, high season CUC\$65/90; 🚻 📺
A well-heeled and oft overlooked option, the Victoria is a diminutive five-story

hotel situated within spitting distance of the more expensive Nacional. Deluxe and compact, though (due to its size) invariably full, this venerable Gran Caribe establishment is housed in an attractive neoclassical building dating from 1928, and contains a swimming pool, a bar and a small shop. A sturdy midrange accommodation option.

HOTEL RIVIERA Map pp224-5 **Hotel \$\$**
Gran Caribe; ☎ 836-4051; cnr Paseo & Malecón; s/d low season CUC\$74/106, high season CUC\$91/130; 🚻 📺 📺

A riot of '50s kitsch, the Riviera was built in 1957 by Mafia boss Meyer Lansky as a Vegas-style gambling haven. At the time it was considered to be the last word in opulence and luxury in Habana, and celebrities flocked from far and wide to enjoy its lavish facilities. The hotel was requisitioned by the new revolutionary government in 1959, with Castro promptly shutting down the casino and seeing that Lansky and his assorted henchmen beat a hasty retreat back to Florida. But the Riviera remained to fight another day. Or did it? As with much of Habana, time seems to have stood still in this faded '50s classic, with the 354 beleaguered rooms looking like they haven't seen a decent makeover since Lansky last checked out. Nevertheless there are a lot of facilities here, including a fantastically retro lobby, a holiday-camp-style swimming pool, a buffet restaurant, a slightly iffy coffee shop (near the pool), and the famous **Copa Room** (p136) cabaret show. Despite its choice location right on the Malecón, you'll need a taxi or a good pair of legs to get to most places.

HOTEL PRESIDENTE Map pp224-5 **Hotel \$\$\$**
Gran Caribe; ☎ 33-37-53; cnr Calzada & Calle G; s/d CUC\$90/140; 🚻 📺 📺

Built in 1928 with an art deco influence, the 10-story Hotel Presidente wouldn't be out of place in New York. There are 160 rooms here, plus a swimming pool and a 10th-floor bar. The lobby, meanwhile, sports an eye-catching black-and-white marble floor and is awash with antiques. Renovated six years ago, the hotel has relatively good decor throughout, although – in common with most Cuban hotels – ongoing maintenance (or lack of it) is always an issue. The main problem with the Presidente, however, is its rather out-of-the-way location.

HOTEL NACIONAL Map pp224-5 **Hotel \$\$\$**
Gran Caribe; ☎ 873-3564; cnr Calles 0 & 21; s/d low season CUC\$120/170, high season CUC\$150/200, ste CUC\$1000; 🚻 📺 📺

The cream of the hotel crop and the flagship of the government-run Gran Caribe chain, the neoclassical-neocolonial-art deco **Hotel Nacional** (p85) is as much a city monument as it is an international accommodation option. Even if you haven't got the money to stay here, chances are you'll find yourself sipping at least one icy mojito in the hotel's exquisite oceanside bar. Steeped in history (p56) and containing rooms that enthusiastically advertise the details of illustrious occupants past, this towering Habana landmark sports two swimming pools, a sweeping manicured lawn and its own top-class nighttime cabaret show, the **Cabaret Parisién** (p136); one of its lavish restaurants, **El Rincón de Cine** (🍷 24hr), has the best burgers and milk shakes in Cuba. While the rooms might lack some of the fancy gadgets of deluxe Varadero, the ostentatious communal areas and the ghosts of Winston Churchill, Frank Sinatra, Lucky Luciano and Errol Flynn, which seem to hover in the luxurious lobby, all add up to a fascinating and unforgettable experience.

HOTEL TRYP HABANA LIBRE Map pp224-5 **International Hotel \$\$\$**
Gran Caribe; ☎ 834-6100; cnr Calles L & 23; r from CUC\$200; 🚻 📺 📺

Habana's biggest and boldest hotel opened in March 1958 on the eve of Batista's last waltz. Once part of the Hilton chain, in January 1959 the **Hotel Habana Libre** (p85) was commandeered by Castro's rebels, who put their boots over all the plush furnishings and turned it into a temporary HQ (Castro effectively ran the country from a suite on one of the upper floors). Now efficiently managed by Spain's Meliá chain as an urban Tryp Hotel, this skyline-hogging modernist giant has 574 rooms, all kitted out to international standard with small balconies and up-to-date fittings that could do with an imaginative makeover. The tour desks in the lobby are helpful for out-of-town excursions and the 25th-floor **Cabaret Turquino** (p136) is a city institution.

VOICES OF HABANA: EDDY GUTIÉRREZ

Casa particular owner, Vedado

Sum up Habana in one sentence. Habana is a living museum. **What defines a habanero?** *Habaneros* [inhabitants of Habana] are jovial, musical and very hospitable people. They are the kind of people with whom you can quickly become friends. **How has Habana changed in the last 10 years?** The social life has changed with the influence of tourism. It has become more cosmopolitan. Cubans now study more languages by using books and by watching language programs on Cuban TV. **What, in your opinion, is the finest Cuban cigar and why?** The best cigars are made from tobacco grown in the Vuelta Abajo region [in Pinar del Río Province], which has the ideal climate and soil. Hoyo de Monterrey José Gener 1860 are excellent, as are Robainas. **What's the best thing about your neighborhood?** The security and the people; Vedado is a very secure area. It also has plenty of parks, good access to the Malecón [Av de Maceo] and a vibrant student population. **Why are Cubans such skillful dancers?** It's in the culture, in the blood. **How can the inquisitive traveler find the 'real' Cuba?** You must come independently rather than as part of a group, and visit the cheaper places – for example, Los Nardos restaurant in Centro Habana, or the Hanoi restaurant in Habana Vieja. **What are the hottest sounds in Habana right now? Where can you hear them?** Jazz, which you can hear at the Jazz Café and the La Zorra y El Cuervo in Vedado; also salsa and *reggaeton* [Cuban hip-hop], which you can hear just about anywhere.

As related to Brendan Sainsbury

HOTEL MELIÁ COHIBA

Map pp224-5 **International Hotel \$\$\$**
Cubanacán; ☎ 833-3636; Paseo btwn Calles 1 & 3; r CUC\$225; 🚰 🚿 🚿

Effortlessly professional, the more central of Habana's two Meliá hotel options hits the spot with knowledgeable staff and modern, well-polished facilities. After a few weeks in the Cuban outback, you'll be impressed by the responsiveness of the service at this oceanside concrete giant, although the ambience is probably more international than Cuban. For workaholics there are rooms especially kitted out for business travelers, and 59 units have Jacuzzis. On the lower levels there's a shopping arcade, one of Habana's plushiest gyms (p146) and the ever popular Havana Café (p136).

PLAYA & MARIANAO

While Playa's and Marianao's plush hotels offer travelers plenty of four-star gimmicks and resort-style creature comforts, the location – 8km to 12km west of the city center – is too far removed from Habana's signature sights to be convenient.

There are also four top-notch casas particulares in this area (opposite).

HOSTAL COSTA SOL

Map pp228-9 **Hotel \$**
☎ 209-0828; cnr Av 3A & Calle 60; s/d CUC\$25/36
Operated by the Ministerio de Educación Superior, this is an intimate place with only 12 rooms (nine of which have en suite bathrooms). The staff are friendly enough and there's a cheap restaurant (breakfast CUC\$3, lunch or dinner CUC\$7). The main problem is its location: far from anywhere.

HOTEL MIRAZUL Map pp228-9 **Hotel \$**
☎ 204-0088/45; Av 5 No 3603 btwn Calles 36 & 40; r CUC\$50

The Hotel Mirazul is an elegant old mansion now operated as a hotel by the Ministerio de Educación Superior. There are eight air-conditioned rooms with TV, a restaurant-bar, and students receive a discount. It's excellent value and usually full.

HOTEL EL VIEJO Y EL MAR

Map pp228-9 **Hotel \$\$**
Cubanacán; ☎ 204-6336; Marina Hemingway, cnr Av 1 & Calle 248
Don't be fooled by the Hemingway legend. The Hotel El Viejo y El Mar (the Old Man and the Sea) at the Marina Hemingway is a rather dull six-story concrete pile

situated – a little inconveniently – 20km west of colonial Habana. At the time of writing the hotel was temporarily closed to foreign tourists due to Misión Milagros (p189). You're not missing much.

HOTEL KOHLY Map pp228-9 **Hotel \$\$**
Gaviota; ☎ 204-0240; cnr Av 49A & Calle 36; s/d CUC\$50/65; 🚰 🚿 🚿

Despite its plethora of facilities (gym, bars, massage, beauty salon, tennis court, swimming pool and excellent pizza restaurant) and reputation as an 'upscale' hotel, the Kohly's 136 air-conditioned rooms and concrete-carpeted communal areas have a rather utilitarian feel. Nonetheless, this amiable Gaviota establishment is efficiently run, with four daily shuttle buses (CUC\$5) whisking guests into central Habana (a good 10km away). If you're in the area, the cheaper and cozier Bosque (p165) just down the road is also worth checking out.

APARTHOTEL MONTEHABANA

Map pp228-9 **Aparthotel \$\$\$**
Gaviota; ☎ 206-9595; Calle 70 btwn Avs 5A & 7; s/d CUC\$60/80, apt from CUC\$100; 🚰 🚿 🚿

This modern Gaviota giant opened in December 2005 with the promise of something a little different. One hundred and one of the rooms here are apartments with living rooms and fully equipped kitchens – a great opportunity to hit the Habana markets and find out how the Cubans cook. To help you in the kitchen there are microwaves, refrigerators, toasters and coffee machines – even your own cutlery. If you're not up to cooking, there's a restaurant (breakfast CUC\$8, dinner buffet CUC\$15). Elsewhere the facilities are shiny and new, with 24-hour internet, car rental and an on-site minimarket. Guests can use the pool at the Occidental Miramar next door.

HOTEL EL COMODORO

Map pp228-9 **Resort Hotel \$\$**
Cubanacán; ☎ 204-5551; cnr Av 1 & Calle 84; s/d low season CUC\$68/90, high season CUC\$70/101, 1-/2-/3-bedroom units low season CUC\$68/128/158, high season CUC\$76/155/195; 🚰 🚿
Next door to the Meliá Habana, but not in the same league, the Hotel El Comodoro is a huge complex of rooms and bungalows

that sprawls like a minivillage next to the ocean about 15km west of La Habana Vieja. The place certainly has potential, but all of the rooms (including 134 in the main four-story building, 10 in a two-story bungalow block facing the ocean and 328 bungalow units spread around their own swimming pool) are tired, worn and in urgent need of a coat of paint or two. The bungalow units, which are substantially newer, come with sitting room, TV, kitchenette, fridge and one to three bedrooms. Elsewhere the hotel has a small – make that tiny – sandy beach protected from the waves by a large iron seawall, a run-down tennis court and a drab looking shopping mall. Service at this hotel has been described as *Fawley Towers*-like.

HOTEL PALCO

Map pp228-9 **Hotel \$\$\$**
Cubanacán; ☎ 204-7235; Calle 146, btwn Avs 11 & 13; s/d low season CUC\$74/94, high season CUC\$91/111; 🚰 🚿 🚿

Attached to the Palacio de las Convenciones, Hotel Palco is a top business hotel with 180 rooms, a business center, a pool, two restaurants, two bars and a cigar shop. It's unlikely you'll stay here unless you're coming to Habana to attend a conference/symposium/product launch. The place is normally block booked and the staff are notorious for not answering the phone.

PLAYA & MARIANAO CASAS PARTICULARES

Rina & Geraldo (Map pp228-9; ☎ 202-4112; Av 3A No 8610 btwn Calles 86 & 88; r CUC\$25-30) This casa has two clean rooms, one with sun terrace. Flexible hosts.

Mayda Bellón Trueba (Map pp228-9; ☎ 203-4490; Av 33 No 3404 btwn Calles 34 & 36; r CUC\$30) A palatial, private spot. Nine houses rent in this tranquil block, allowing big groups to arrange casa accommodation together. English spoken.

Suites Olimpia Jorge Pérez (Map pp228-9; ☎ /fax 202-4126; Calle 96 No 535 btwn Avs 5F & 7, Miramar; r CUC\$30-35) This casa has a fridge.

Marta Rodríguez (Map pp228-9; ☎ 203-8596; Calle 42 No 914; r CUC\$40) Rents two rooms outfitted with TV, VCR, stereo and fridge.

HOTEL BELLO CARIBEMap pp228-9 Hotel \$\$**Cubanacán;** ☎ 33-05-67; Calle 158 btwn Calles 29 & 31; s/d CUC\$75/95

Situated near the Palacio de las Convenciones and Cuba's biotech facilities, the Bello Caribe is the closest Habana hotel to José Martí International Airport. It is currently being used by Misión Milagros (p189) and is closed to foreign tourists.

HOTEL COPACABANAMap pp228-9 Hotel \$\$**Gran Caribe;** ☎ 204-1037; cnr Av 1 & Calle 44; s/d CUC\$85/130; 🚻

The five-story Hotel Copacabana is a 168-room hotel complex right on the coast, and although there's no beach, a seawall creates a protected pool. At the time of writing it was undergoing renovation after a spell with Misión Milagros (p189) but when it reopens it should be a viable midrange option.

HOTEL CHATEAU MIRAMARMap pp228-9 Hotel \$\$**Cubanacán;** ☎ 204-1951; Av 1 btwn Calles 62 & 64; s/d CUC\$95/120; 🚻 🚰 🚿

The Hotel Chateau Miramar is a medium-sized five-story hotel used primarily by businesspeople. The 50 rooms with mini-fridges are functional, though they struggle to justify the four-star billing. There's a post office at the reception and a swimming pool next to the sea. This small hotel has a more intimate feel than its neighbors, and many feel the service here is superior.

PANORAMA HOTEL HAVANAMap pp228-9 Resort Hotel \$\$**Gaviota;** ☎ 204-0100; cnr Av 3 & Calle 70; s/d/tr CUC\$95/120/145; 🚻 🚰 🚿

Gaviota's flashy new 'glass cathedral' opened in 2003, making it one of Habana's newest hotels. The strange aesthetics – acres of blue-tinted glass – improve once you step inside the monumental lobby, where elevators whisk you promptly up to one of 317 airy rooms that offer great views over Miramar and beyond. Extra facilities include a business center, a photo shop, numerous restaurants, and a spacious and shapely swimming pool. The Panorama is almost too big, however, giving the place a rather deserted and antiseptic feel.

OCCIDENTAL MIRAMARMap pp228-9 Resort Hotel \$\$\$**Gaviota;** ☎ 204-3584; cnr Av 5 & Calle 74; s/d CUC\$100/135; 🚻 🚰 🚿

Formerly the Novotel, this 427-room colossus was taken over by Gaviota a few years back and has benefited as a result. Professional staff, great business facilities and high standards of service are par for the course here. There are also plenty of sporty extras if the isolated location starts to grate, including tennis courts, swimming pool, sauna, gym and games room. A regular shuttle bus whizzes guests into central Habana for CUC\$5.

HOTEL MELIÁ HABANAMap pp228-9 International Hotel \$\$\$**Cubanacán;** ☎ 204-8500; Av 3 btwn Calles 76 & 80; s/d from CUC\$225; 🚻 🚰 🚿Ugly outside but beautiful within, Miramar's gorgeous Hotel Meliá Habana is one of the city's best-run and best-equipped accommodation options. Inside, the 409 rooms (four of which are wheelchair accessible) are positioned around a salubrious lobby abundant in ferns, hanging vines, marble statues and gushing water features; outside, Cuba's largest and most beautiful swimming pool stands next to a desolate, rocky shore. But the area in which the Meliá trumps all opposition is its service, which is polite, punchy and professional. The **buffet restaurant** (🍴) breakfast, lunch & dinner) is equally memorable. Despite the high room rates, the Meliá often has special offers, with rooms going for as little as CUC\$165.**EASTERN HABANA****HOTEL PANAMERICANO**Map p231 Hotel \$**Islazul;** ☎ 95-10-00/10; cnr Av Central & Paseo Panamericano, Cojimar; s/d low season CUC\$49/54; 🚻 🚰

At the entrance to Cojimar, 2km from the Hemingway bust, this architectural aberration was built to house athletes attending the 11th Pan-American Games in 1991 – though you could be forgiven for thinking it was 1961. Inconveniently located and rough around the edges, the establishment was undergoing a renovation at the time of research after a spell as a Misión Milagros (p189) convalescent home.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'