



THE URBANIST'S

Havana

REFORMS BRING NEW STREET LIFE, COMMERCE, HARDSPIN, AND HOPE.



TO OUTSIDERS, HAVANA seems stuck in the Sputnik era—a fair impression given the '57 Chevys plying the streets and the crowds of guayabera-clad men puffing on one-peso cigarettes. But from deep in the trenches, the city has been witnessing lightning-fast change. New economic regulations introduced in May have been a much-needed stimulus for private enterprises—from drag supper clubs to scuba schools to beauty salons—all competing to serve an emerging middle class and an influx of tourists.

SUNSET ON CALLE 6, THE EPICENTER OF HAVANA'S YOUTH SCENE.

But as the newly moneyed swig Red Bulls and race tricked-out Daewoos, most Cubans still limp along on an average monthly salary of \$20. While it's true that housing, food, and other subsidies (health and education, most famously) offset low wages, many Cubans still go wanting for the basics. The country anxiously awaits the legalization of private-home and car sales at the end of this year, an unprecedented reform that could actually deepen inequities, especially if private-property rights are extended to foreigners—a change not expected as yet. In the meantime, Habaneros, as always, laugh, dance, and roll with the punches as they try to cope with the Cuban government's newest recipe for prosperity.

CONNER GORRY

01 **YES, YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE**

The U.S. has prohibited its citizens from traveling to Cuba since 1961 (not counting a break in the travel ban from 1977 to 1982). Still, over 50,000 Americans—as well as an estimated 300,000 people of Cuban descent, who are permitted to travel freely—make it to the island every year. Here, three ways, both legal and illegal, they dodge the ban.

1 **ORGANIZED TOUR**

A bit of paperwork and a big check (trips start at \$1,500 per week, without airfare) will land you on a tour run by organizations licensed by the U.S. Treasury to bring groups to Cuba. "I went with **Global Exchange**, a real turnkey solution," says Tim Russell, a travel consultant. "It was a comfort to know I was going legally, even if it meant giving up a great deal of independence—and it required a considerably larger budget."

2 **THIRD-COUNTRY TRAVEL**

Some Americans leapfrog U.S. restrictions by traveling through **Cancún, Toronto**, and other international hubs. "I find Cuba," says frequent visitor Sam L. "Cheap flights [generally around \$400 round trip] to Havana are advertised all over Cancún, making it easy to get to the forbidden island."

3 **DOUBLE PASSPORT**

"For me, it was super-simple," says Guatemalan-American Luis Valermeza. "I just used my **C-4 passport** instead of my U.S. one." It should be noted that dual nationals are under U.S. jurisdiction, making this tactic illegal.

A NOTE ON GETTING BACK: Any evidence that you've made an illegal trip to Cuba, and you could face both civil penalties and criminal prosecution. "Luckily, Cuba doesn't stamp passports," says Mike Johnson, who recently came back from Havana via Cancún. "As far as U.S. officials were concerned, I had been in Mexico." Still, the world traveler took precautions: "On my last night in Havana, I emptied the contents of my bags and removed anything remotely related to Cuba. I left all receipts, guidebook, business cards, and brochures in the hotel."



HAVANA

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THE NEW NORMAL

IN APRIL, the Cuban government adopted a passel of economic reforms—some popular, some less so—that amount to revolutionary Cuba's most ambitious capitalist experiment to date. Here, the three most sweeping changes.

➔ **SELF-EMPLOYMENT**
Over 180 professions, including cobbler, street vendor, and barber, are now permitted to work for themselves, instead of being employed solely by the state.

Impact on locals: "You can buy anything on the street these days," says driver and cook Daniel Sánchez. "Last week, a guy passed my house selling piggy banks and bifocals." Of course, private enterprises charge more than state-run ones, so only those with the means can take full advantage.

Impact on tourists: Some 330,000 Cubans around the country have entered the private sector under the new regulations, which means more taxis, more private restaurants, more rooms for rent, and street food everywhere.

➔ **HOSPITALITY RULES**
The government relaxed laws for renting private homes and running private restaurants.

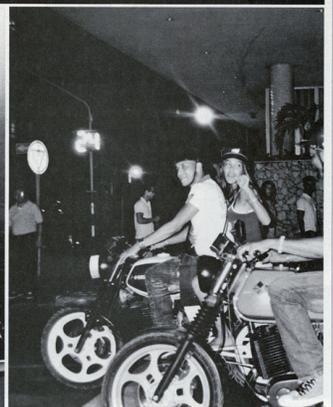
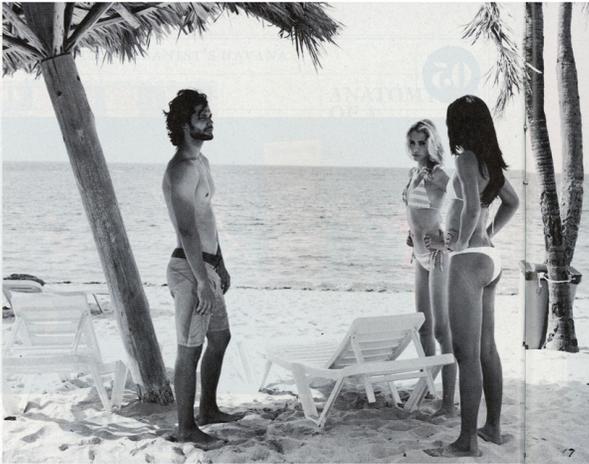
Impact on locals: Cubans can now contract labor, rent more rooms to tourists (including entire independent homes—previously illegal), and seat up to 50 people in private restaurants (up from twelve under the old law).

Impact on tourists: Increased competition gives visitors more leverage in bargaining for room rates, and the opportunity to rent an entire house or apartment.

➔ **FOOD RATIONS**
A reduction in food rations to all but the most vulnerable, including children and pregnant women.

Impact on locals: Says mother of three Yaima Domínguez: "Our salt ration has been cut to a little sack every three months. If that doesn't last, we have to buy it in the dollar stores. It's not easy."

Impact on tourists: As rations diminish, it could lead to higher prices for prepared food and, sadly, more begging in the streets.



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Castro's Children

In his new book, *Havana Libre (Damiani)*, New York photographer Michael Dweck captures young middle- and upper-class Habaneros (as well as the middle-aged sons of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara) reveling in their city of dance halls, beach clubs, drug strips, and grand movie palaces.