

TRAVEL Music, art and dance reasons to visit Cuba

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE SPECIAL WRITER

(Last of a two-part series) A week in Havana turned out to be one of the most exciting and educational trips I have taken. One thing I learned is that despite its problems, Cuba has a leg up on us. Sunday is not the most segregated day of the week. Religion is on the rise in Cuba, and services both in synagogues and churches are attended by Cubans of all colors and ethnicities. Cuba, once an atheist country, has been secular since the fall of the Communist bloc. We attended Friday night services at the Patronato Synagogue and Sunday church services at the Luyano Presbyterian Church. Both were followed by meals with the leadership and members of the congregations. Restoration of both the synagogue and church was accomplished through donations from congregations in the United States. Kirk of the Hills, in Bloomfield Hills, financed the Luyano church's electrical wiring, according to our tour managers, Bob and Myrtle Everett of St. Clair Shores. The Everetts have been conducting group exchanges to Cuba since 1966. Ours was an exchange co-sponsored by the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit and Central United Methodist Church of Detroit. It was at the lunch at Luyano Presbyterian that I saw the first Diet Coke I had spied in Cuba. Since nothing can be imported from the United States, it had been bottled and brought in from Mexico. As a Diet Coke addict, I had reconciled myself to drinking tea even though you can get traditional Coke (also from Mexico) rather easily. But, two days into the trip, I found that the National Hotel, where we stayed, had a product called Tu Cola Dietetic that, when spiced with a lemon or lime, was palatable. Of course the drink of hard choice in Cuba is the mojito, made with sugar, lime juice, light Cuban rum, soda water and a sprig of two mint. "You don't go to Cuba to eat," the Everetts warned us in our pre-trip documents. So every decent meal was a bonus. We enjoyed family-style dining at El Ajibje, featuring a typical Cuban meal of the dark meat of chicken, rice and beans and the silvered cabbage, cucumber and carrot salad that we ran into everywhere. We had another satisfying dinner at Dr.'s Cafe, one of the privately-owned restaurants called "paladares" the state allows to operate in an individual's home. And one night we splurged and went to La Torre, which serves pretty good continental fare, at the top of FOCSA, Havana's tallest (35 stories) building. The huge building is all but empty, with a dollar market occupying a tiny section of its first floor and the restaurant at the top. Otherwise, the former luxury apartment building is supposedly awaiting renovation although we were told that the last few residents won't move out. The heralded view from the top is of a dimly-lit city, hard hit by electrical shortages. Of course, ordinary Cubans don't have the means to eat out. They are on rationing system that allows them, for example, eight eggs, five pounds of rice, a quarter of a chicken, and milk for children up to age eight, on a per person monthly basis at a subsidized rate. "Everyone here is poor, but nobody here has hunger," Dr. Jose Miller, the president of the Patronato Synagogue, told us. That was echoed by Dona Aree, the first female pastor of Luyano Presbyterian. "When you talk about starving, I don't know what you're talking



Poster: Propaganda on billboards, like this one of Fidel Castro, is the only advertising allowed in Cuba.

about," she said. "It's not a social problem in Cuba. We don't think about it much." But what they must think about is the absolute scarcity of product — whether it be the lack of variety in food on their tables, the shortage of books, pencils and paper in the schools, and the lack of prescription medicines for their highly-touted medical system. "Just consume what you need," is one of the socialist slogans you see on the only signage in Cuba — government billboards. They, very frankly, have no choice. Still, the Cubans we met were a wistful, but not unhappy people. As they wait for things to change, a main outlet appears to be their art, dance and music. The street art on display in the flea markets was among the best I've seen in any country. And the finest museum that we visited is the new, first-class Museum of Contemporary Cuban Art. We weren't lucky enough to see a ballet performance, but the Ballet de Nacional de Cuba is world renowned. Then, of course, there's the music — popularized through the film and recording of The Buena Vista Social Club. "I just consume what you need," is one of the socialist slogans you see on the only signage in Cuba — government billboards. They, very frankly, have no choice. Still, the Cubans we met were a wistful, but not unhappy people. As they wait for things to change, a main outlet appears to be their art, dance and music. The street art on display in the flea markets was among the best I've seen in any country. And the finest museum that we visited is the new, first-class Museum of Contemporary Cuban Art. We weren't lucky enough to see a ballet performance, but the Ballet de Nacional de Cuba is world renowned. Then, of course, there's the music — popularized through the film and recording of The Buena Vista Social Club. "I just consume what you need," is one of the socialist slogans you see on the only signage in Cuba — government billboards. They, very frankly, have no choice. Still, the Cubans we met were a wistful, but not unhappy people. As they wait for things to change, a main outlet appears to be their art, dance and music. The street art on display in the flea markets was among the best I've seen in any country. And the finest museum that we visited is the new, first-class Museum of Contemporary Cuban Art. We weren't lucky enough to see a ballet performance, but the Ballet de Nacional de Cuba is world renowned. Then, of course, there's the music — popularized through the film and recording of The Buena Vista Social Club.

Where can I find? Through reader feedback, this interactive feature is dedicated to helping readers locate retail merchandise that's difficult to find. If you have a request or information about where a product is sold or service is available, call (248) 901-2555 and leave a message with your name and phone number. Please be patient about your requests and feedback; we receive an overwhelming number of phone calls. Also, please spell any uncommon items. If you don't see information about your request, we couldn't find it. Requests are published twice. Baker's catalog (800) 827-6836. WHERE CAN I FIND: - A store that sells LaNatur bottled water (from the East Coast) for Jo of Bloomfield. - A store that sells Hollman's dressing citrus-variety for Shelly of Farmington Hills. - Someone to repair the mechanism on a patio umbrella for Mrs. D. of Livonia. - A store that sells a Laura Ashley comforter for Dorcen. - The bank that sells the mad money in \$50 singles for Don. - A store that sells bright red shoe polish in a paste for John of Canton. - A store that handles old 78 and 3 1/2 records for Kathy of Farmington. - A store that sells an under the counter jar opener for George. - A store that sells a Rubbermaid rotating canister set (flour on top sugar, tea coffee on the bottom) for Joy of Orchard Lake. - The words and music for the Parade of Soldiers for Eleanor of Livonia. - A store that sells Glad or Zip-loc 2 gallon (jumbo) size plastic bags for Pam of Livonia. - A store that sells blueberry products (jams, jellies) from Maine for Nicole of Beverly Hills. - A store that sells Hollman's thousand Island salad dressing for Kathy of West Bloomfield. - A store that sells Tasty cake (similar to Hostess cakes) for Michelle of Livonia. - A store that sells Mint rub by Bristol Moyers. - A store that sells Lustru cream shampoo for Elsie. - A store that sells eight-inch scrub brushes for a Regina model A floor scrubber for William. - Looking for the recipes for carrot walnut salad, broccoli cheese and tomato salad and salad dressings from Richard & Reese restaurant formerly in Birmingham for Mimi of Birmingham. - A store that sells Lush cologne by Coty for Linda of Livonia. - A store that sells Jergens anti-bacterial hand soap in the cherry almond scent for Linda. - A store that sells Aqua Net #1 all-purpose all day/all over hold unscented hairspray for Laura. - A store that sells peach Dial antibacterial or moisture soap for Laura. - A store that sells a ring of pansy flowers - A store that sells a three-quarter long sleeve cotton flannel dress, also small, with buttons or snaps for Fran of Bloomfield Township. - A store that sells Lucuna ice cream for Gerald of Southfield. Lucuna is a fruit from South America. - Compiled by Sandi Jarackas

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GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

A large grid of movie listings organized by theater and location. Each entry includes the movie title, showtimes, and prices. Theaters listed include National Amusements, Showcase, United Artists, and others. Locations range from Detroit to various suburbs like Farmington Hills and Livonia.