

Provided | MSDN Photo

The Faro Castillo del Morro lighthouse in Havana, Cuba. It was built in 1845 on the ramparts of an old fortress that defended the city and island.

Farm-to-table food, classic cars, rich history, music everywhere

HAVANA, CUBA



Mike & Eileen Giltner

Bill Dollar is a member of the Del Webb Write-On group and travels extensively. Here is his story from his recent trip to Cuba.

Recently, I walked the streets where Che Guevara, Jose Marti, Fidel Castro, and Ernest Hemmingway walked. Havana, Cuba. Here, it is called Habana, Cuba, and it is where I met my six fellow travelers and our wonderful guide, Daryl Hawk. I highly recommend his Cuba tours. I did not mind waiting for everyone at the airport, for it gave me more time to admire the classic

cars that drove around the airport picking up arrivals. Or just showing off their luster from the ever-present sun. Well, almost ever-present sun. Flowers do need rain sometimes.

These were superb autos that shined like the diamonds they were. They were from the fifties and sixties yet looked like they just rolled off an assembly line. I learned that parts are hard to come by, and upkeep must be very difficult. But they maintain them to perfection.

Our hotel was just a short walk to the magnificent Malecon, or historic waterfront. Fishermen were there, and you can see the El Morro, or old fort.

Our meals were fantastic, several farm to table. And offering a picturesque view of Havana and beyond. At one restaurant out in the country, after we walked through an abundant orchard garden, we feasted on beef, chicken, and lobster. The only problem was that

sometimes I did not share as we passed bowls of food, glorious food, around the table. Actually, that was not a problem for me. I'm not sure what my travel compatriots thought.

And music. Music. Music. Everywhere you heard beats to a drum or guitar strumming and magical voices. The apex of the island's melodious harmonies was the Buena Vista Social Club. There have been documentaries made about it. Again, wonderful food followed by dancers and singers. Some have been performing for over 50 years, others more modern. This author was forced to dance on the stage. Okay, maybe forced is too strong a word. It was more of a tap on my shoulder by a beautiful dancer. I did not want to disappoint her.

We visited Ernest Hemingway's home, which has been kept exactly as it was when he wrote and drank and slept there. Ernest Hemingway is to Havana what Elvis is to Memphis or the Alamo is to San Antonio. Murals of him are all over the city, as are shirts, pictures, and bookmarks of his image.



Provided | MSDN Photo

Traveler Bill Dollar poses next to Hemingway's statue.

We also witnessed the lighting of the cannon at El Morro, a nightly event. It is called El Canonazo (the cannon firing). The soldiers marching are in uniforms from the 1800s. It is amazing to see and hear. It was loud. I think my neighbors in Huntley even heard it.

One of the main reasons to go is to support the Cuban people. I brought crayons and coloring books and was allowed to visit two schools and pass them out. Others in the groups brought over-the-counter medicines, band-aids, etc.

I cannot recall any one particular highlight. The entire trip was filled with daily highlights. The people were all warm, welcoming, and friendly. There was history and art everywhere. It was such a monumental trip, and I am soon returning. I will visit some cities and hear some musicians I missed on the first trip. And maybe I will get to dance on stage again.

Our guide, Daryl Hawk, organizes several trips. I highly recommend him. Everything on the island is taken care of. His website is: www.theunconventionaltravelers.com

** Bill is the author of two books: Leps and Elves and A Dog and A Cat and a Crime, both available on Amazon.com*