

“Notes from the Underground”

A Brief Guide to Havana and Santiago’s Paladares, Bed & Breakfasts, and Night Life

Ted Henken, Ph.D. - April, 2006

t_henken@yahoo.com

This guide was compiled in a spirit of solidarity with the Cuban people. It is intended to help them help themselves and aid visitors in having a more positive, authentic experience in Cuba. Enjoy and share widely!

***Paladares* (private restaurants)**

The name *paladar* comes from the Brazilian soap opera, *Vale Tudo* (Anything Goes), which was extremely popular in Cuba in the early 1990s. Raquel, the enterprising protagonist of the *telenovela*, was a poor woman who moved from the Brazilian provinces to Rio. She worked as an itinerant food vendor on the famous beaches of Copacabana and eventually made it big after setting up her own chain of small restaurants, which she christened “*Paladar*.”

Literally meaning “palate” in both Spanish and Portuguese, the curious origin of the name “paladar” hints at the initial high hopes Cubans had for the potential of these private, home-grown eateries during the worst stages of the “special period” that began in 1990. At the time *Vale Tudo* was making Cuban mouths water, the size of the legal self-employed sector was negligible and private restaurants were forbidden by law. However, *paladar*-like restaurants began springing up across the island in the early 1990s in response to the growing scarcity of food. Armed with an unyielding hope mixed with a deep sense of the absurd, Cubans followed Raquel’s lead by beginning to refer to their own home-grown restaurants as *paladares*.

In September 1993, as an administrative response to the multitude of homegrown survival strategies developed by the Cuban people, the government decided to legalize over 100 self-employed occupations. Included among these occupations were four food service activities, including what became known as the infamous “*et cetera*” – “producer of light snacks (refreshments, sweets, popsicles, et cetera).” By early December the government was forced to modify its initial decision because many Cubans who had obtained licenses were, in fact, running full-fledged restaurants under the broadest possible interpretation of “*et cetera*.”

Debates in the Cuban Parliament over the offending “*et cetera*” concluded that legalization of food service had been a mistake due to the suspicion that these fledgling restaurants encouraged competition, depended on pilfered supplies, and unlawfully contracted employees. Despite the legal reversal and the subsequent crackdown, the number of these speak-easy eateries was estimated to be as high as 4,000 nationwide by early 1994, with perhaps 1,500 located in Havana alone.

In June 1995, the government approved a resolution that finally recognized and began to legally regulate *paladares*. The new law specifically addressed the previously suspended self-employment category of “producer of light snacks (*et cetera*)” and laid out three specific types of food service operations that would be henceforth allowed. This list included street vendors, home-front vendors, caterers, and full-fledged home-based *paladares*.

Paladar operators would have to pay monthly taxes in the currency in which they charged their customers. Additionally, while no other self-employment operation can hire employees, the government recognized that *paladares* had always operated with the help of a service and kitchen staff. Therefore, the law established a peculiar regulation prohibiting “salaried employees” on the one hand, while mandating the hiring of at least three “family helpers” on the other. Thus was born the fiction that *paladar* employees are family members.

At this stage, the government also placed a list of infamous limitations on the size and scope of the *paladares* in order to limit competition with government restaurants. The most well-known restriction is the seating limit of just “*doce sillas*” (12 chairs). Other restrictions limited each household to a single self-employment license, required that operators purchase their supplies either in state-run dollar-stores or in private farmer’s markets, mandated that restaurateurs save all receipts as proof of legal supply sources, and prohibited the sale of seafood, horsemeat, and beef. Finally, *paladares* were subject to unannounced visits from three different inspector corps.

Ironically, government regulations strictly defining *paladares* as “home-based family-run” restaurants have given them their most appealing, unique, and authentically Cuban characteristic. Unlike private restaurants elsewhere in the world, *paladares* must be located in the owner-operator’s home. In fact, the law requires that the owner in fact be the operator, though this regulation is often flexible in practice.

Besides provoking some creative ownership arrangements and silent partners, these requirements have produced some of the most compact yet elegant and original “spaces” to be found in Cuba today. A rough equivalent to these hidden-in-plain-sight eateries might be the “invisible” speakeasy saloons that populated the underbelly of prohibition-era America. Like those saloons, Cuba’s *paladares* often face the dilemma of trying to

stay well-hidden while at the same time needing to publicize their existence to potential customers. Consider this guide my small attempt to help them accomplish that goal.

Many of Havana's legally registered paladares have been driven out of business or underground since 1996 when they reached their high water mark of perhaps 500. Fortunately, Havana still boasts between 60 and 90 *paladares* of varying quality and price located throughout the city. In general, only the largest, strongest, and most well-connected operations have been able to survive given the constant repression and recent crackdown (late-fall, 2005) against the "new rich" of the small-scale private enterprise sector in Cuba.

Despite the crackdown, most paladares that managed to survive through 2002 are still in business today and many have continued to renovate their facilities and expand their offerings considerably. The picture in Santiago is less pleasant. Of the estimated 115 *paladares* that existed there in 1996, only two legal ones are still in business (with many others operating clandestinely).

Within each section of this guide (organized by neighborhood), *paladares* are listed according to my overall personal preference, taking price, quality, service, atmosphere, and other amenities into account. Remember that things often change without warning in Cuba's private sector, so don't be surprised if the place has closed down. Also be aware that most paladares pay commissions to the taxi driver/guide who brought you to the door, so make clear when you arrive that you came on your own steam or call ahead to make a reservation to avoid having to pay \$5-\$10 extra in hidden costs. Remember, in Cuba discretion is the golden rule, but don't miss out on the great generosity, conviviality, and hospitality of the Cuban people!

Below, I give the street name (often a number like in Manhattan), followed by the house number (#). This is always followed by the two cross streets at either end of the block ("esq." means that it is on the corner, "altos" means second floor and "bajos" means first floor). For example, the first *paladar* on my list (*El Gringo Viejo*: Calle 21 #454 % E y F, Vedado) is at number 454 on 21st Street, between (written "e/" or "%") Avenues E and F ("y" means "and" in Spanish) in the Vedado neighborhood.

Recently, most telephone numbers in Havana have been lengthened to 7 digits. I have changed the numbers here accordingly. As a rule, in Vedado add the number "8" to the beginning of old 6-digit numbers, and "83" to the beginning of old 5-digit numbers. In Miramar, insert a "0" between the first two digits of old 6-digit numbers.

PALADARES

Price:	\$ = <\$5	\$\$ = \$5-\$10	\$\$\$ = \$10-\$15	\$\$\$\$ = >\$15
Food quality:	☉ = OK	☉☉ = Good	☉☉☉ = Great	☉☉☉☉ = excellent
Service:	★ = OK	★ ★ = Good	★ ★ ★ = Great	★ ★ ★ ★ = excellent
Atmosphere:	☹ = basic/dull	☺ = friendly	☺☺ = warm & inviting	🍷 = luxurious
Hours:	🕒 = 12-3, 7-12	🕒🕒 = 12-12	🕒🕒🕒 = All hours	
Other amenities:	🍴 = Other foods	🚕 = Taxi	🏠 = Rent room	🍷 = Stocked bar

El Vedado

El Gringo Viejo: Calle 21 #454 % E y F; Omar; 831-1946; \$\$ ☉☉☉☉ ★★☆☆ ☺🕒🕒 🍴 🍷 🏠

This *paladar's* motto gets it exactly right. After searching for large portions of good food, at a good price, in an elegant, relaxed atmosphere, *The Old Gringo* is definitely, "*el lugar adecuado en el momento oportuno*" (the right place at the right time).

This classy, unique place in the middle of the Vedado neighborhood has consistently impressed me and my friends as it has continued to update and improve its menu and infrastructure. How many other places in Cuba (or the world) can boast quail's eggs, pig's feet, frog's legs, and sweet fried plantains as appetizers!

Gringo is named for its Cuban owner-operator, Omar, who is often found on the premises regaling guests and insisting that they try his most recent wine and spirits acquisitions. Though Omar is far from a gringo (a word not used in Cuba – it's "Yuma" instead), he is the spitting image of Gregory Peck's character in the American film, "The Old Gringo" (based on a novel by Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes). The poster from the film prominently adorns one wall, while other walls feature the posters of other Cuban and international films.

The main dishes are inventive and enticing. The house specialty is *pollo acetunado* (stewed chicken with green olives) and they occasionally serve an excellent smoked salmon. The fish and squid are excellent. There is a fully stocked bar and a respectable wine list. Also, this place is perhaps the best example of transforming a tight basement apartment into an original, elegantly decorated culinary enterprise. The portions are large and the service is quick. Open noon-11 p.m. every day. There is no sign on the street but there is always a guard/doorman on duty. You pass through a large wooden door on the street and enter a different world as you pass through a secure entryway with a remote lock. That cloak and dagger experience alone is worth a visit. Highly recommended.

El Hurón Azul: Humboldt # 153, esq. P; Carlos or Fran; 879-1691; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚
Consistently quick, professional service and quality food. While there are still inexpensive items on the menu, prices have recently gone up considerably and each of the side items so generously brought to your table (an extensive selection of fresh fruit, fresh rolls, and cold bottled water) will appear later on your bill so be careful when you order. Huron Azul is a favorite dining spot of the Cuban jet-set (mainly artists and intellectuals) whose photos and artwork adorn the walls. The paladar is centrally located, just one block off of *La Rampa* (23rd Street) and two blocks south of *Hotel Nacional*. Again, since this place refuses to pay commissions, don't be fooled by street hustlers outside trying to lead you away. If you are particularly tight on time or money, this place has been known to serve great *cajitas* (boxed lunches) in Cuban pesos (32-36 pesos or \$1.50). Highly recommended.

Doña Juana: Calle 19 #909 (altos), % 6 y 8; Juana, of course; 832-2699; open noon to midnight
While *Juana la Cubana* around the corner has closed its doors, you might check out her mother's place here. The food is just as economical and even tastier. Honestly, some of the best, most inexpensive food I've had in Havana. Located one block toward 23 from the Lennon Park, this well-hidden *paladar* is actually a Bed & Breakfast.

El Decameron: Linea #753 % Paseo y 2; Niuska; 832-2444; \$\$-\$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ 💰 ⌚⌚ ➔ 🍷
A beautifully decorated restaurant with loads of plants and antique clocks. Includes a beautiful waiting room with a full bar. It features some of Havana's best and cheapest pizza in many styles. It also has an excellent eggplant appetizer. Friendly, professional service and ice cold beer on those hot Havana days. Great for lunch.

Doña Laura: Calle H % 21 y 23; Jaqueline; \$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚
This place is **NOT** a *paladar*. However, it is likely Havana's most popular and most economical *punto fijo* (a standing-room-only, porch-based, fast-food restaurant). Your visit is sure to be memorable as the service is fast and friendly and the food is consistently good. Places like this are mainly frequented by Cubans, but your money (23 pesos for a boxed lunch and a killer fruit milk-shake) will be gladly accepted. They also serve croquet sandwiches for 5 pesos. It was undergoing remodeling in August, 2003, and may have changed its name and added a few Chinese items to the menu. Open for **LUNCH ONLY** on weekdays (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

El Bistrot: Calle K #12 % 7th y Malecón; Carmen; 832-2708; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚ ➔
It is not clear if this place is still in business. Go by or call ahead to see but it is usually only open for dinner. If you are lucky enough to catch the owners serving food you will not be disappointed. All dishes are served in deep, juicy skilletes giving the food a special flavor. Dinner includes an incomparable view of the *Malecón* from the balcony.

La Palma: Jovellar (aka, 27 de Noviembre) #305 % M y N; Eloisa; 878-3488; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚ 🏠
An old home with a vine-covered courtyard dining area located near the University. The staff is very friendly and the food is consistently good and served in large portions. Don't let a jinetero take you here as your price will jump by \$5. This place is actually a B&B so keep it in mind if you need a place to stay. (E-mail: EloisaMN@yahoo.es)

Escorpión: Calle 17 #105 % L y M; Miralys or Alain; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚
The operators of this joint are extremely friendly and fast. The food is very reasonably priced and quite tasty. Very centrally located near the Focsa building, this is one of the few places open after midnight. Exercise discretion.

El Recanto: Calle 17 #957 Apt 8 % 8 y 10; Pyty; 830-4396; \$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚ 🍷
Touts outside will likely tell you that this place has gone the way of the dinosaur, but it is still in business and Pyty (a professional musician among other talents) will fix you up good! This is one of the few places left that still charges in Cuban pesos ('*Moneda Nacional*'). The pathway from the street to the roof, where you dine under a canopy, is as memorable as the fine Cuban Creole cuisine. It has a nice bar. Don't be thrown off by the rundown entryway. Located on the 2nd floor. Closed Wednesdays.

La Complaciente: Calle 15 % L y M; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚
A centrally located, simple patio restaurant with low prices, good food, & quick service. You will learn what a *solar* is after dining here. Be sure to try the smoked pork chops!! Fix the price before you eat.

El Helecho: Calle 6 #203 % 11 y Linea; 831-3552; Barbarita or Josefa; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚ 🍷
On my visit I was impressed with the menu, elegant atmosphere, and huge fern dominating the dining room (thus the name 'el helecho'). Specialties include Uruguayan pork-steak and fish. Closed Tuesdays. Open until 10:30 p.m.

Los Amigos: Calle M #253 % 19 y 21; 830-0880; Elisa; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚ 🍷
Adjacent to Focsa building in the La Rampa area of Vedado. It is a popular place with a simple yet appealing menu. Head down the long corridor to the back. Try the fish fillet or the Uruguayan pork. Housing may be available.

Amor: Calle 23 #759, 3rd floor, % B y C; Elda and Amor; 833-8150; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ 💰 ⌚⌚ 🍷
Visually, this *paladar* is truly impressive. You take an antique Otis elevator up to the 3rd floor of this high-ceilinged mansion. It has been closed for years but the people here are helpful and friendly. Do not miss the *Peña* (a free folkloric jam session with local talent of varying quality) on the first Sunday of each month from 2-6 pm on the roof.

Casa Sarasua: Calle 25 #510, Apt. 1, % H y I; Juan Bruno; 832-2114; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★☆☆ ☺️ ⌚⌚

This place is more of a private museum for antique swords and coins than a bustling *paladar*, but the atmosphere is pleasing and the food is pretty good. It has a powerful air-conditioner, good to fight against those Cuban summers. Located near the University. Open noon - 11 p.m., Monday thru Saturday. (E-mail: sarasua@usa.net).

El Jinete: Infanta #102 esq, 25; 878-2290; Emilio; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷 ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 ➡ 🍷 ; 6-12 during low season
Hidden from view a little too well. The food is good, but a bit overpriced. Beware of jineteros.

La Tasquita: Jovellar #160 % Espada y San Francisco; Aralicia; 879-8647; \$\$ 🍷🍷 ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 🍷
Probably the smallest *paladar* in Havana. Quaint and well designed. One of the true survivors from the early days.

Marpoly: Calle K #154 % 13 y 11; 832-2471; \$\$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★ ★ ★ ☺ 🍷 🕒🕒 ➡ 🚗 🏠 🍷
This place might be at the top of my list based on the luxury surroundings and the scrumptious menu selection, however, the prices are very high (\$15-\$20 per plate). Reserve this place for special occasions and if you want to combine an overnight or weekend visit since they are actually licensed to rent out 3-4 private rooms (\$25-\$35 per night). They also offer excellent seafood platters, a full bar, a selection of wines, and just about anything else you might desire!! However, it is unclear just how 'private' these establishments still are.

Aries Paladar: Universidad #456 % J y L; & **Restaurant de Oscar:** off of Calle 25 % K y L
Both places are located between the University and the *Hotel Habana Libre*. Oscar offers *cajitas*.

Los Tres Mosqueteros: Calle 23 #607 % E y F; Omar; \$\$ 🍷🍷 ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 ➡
Very close to the intersection of 23rd and Presidentes (G), this place is on the balcony overlooking 23rd Street. The family is friendly and the food comes quick. The atmosphere is a bit dull and the lighting is bad. The food is OK.

Union Francesa: Calle 17, esq. 6; \$\$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★ ★ ★ 🍷 🕒🕒 ➡ 🍷
This restaurant is not a true *paladar*. Nominally, it is the French immigrant's association and as such can skirt many of the *paladar* regulations on size and service. It allows only 'members' to enter, but anyone with Yankee dollars qualifies automatically as a member. Its three levels include a bar and restaurant on the roof. The prices are quite steep but the atmosphere is appealing. It's across from "Parque Lennon?!" featuring a brand-new statue of **John Lennon** sitting on a park bench (as featured in the fantastic new Cuban film "*Suite Habana*"). John has company now 24/7 since novelty thieves are constantly after his spectacles (he's now on his fourth pair). If you don't eat here be sure to visit John, whose music was once banned in Cuba as a corrupting Western influence on the children of the revolution. However, Castro himself was present for the statue's unveiling and for a more recent peace concert. The times they are a changin', or should we say, "Plus ca change...?"

El Capitolio: Calle 13 #1159 % 16 y 18; 831-9251; Julio and Adelfa; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷 ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 ➡
While others have raved about it, I found *El Capitolio* overpriced and plain, even if the food was good. If a cabbie brings you here, make sure s/he does not try to get a commission as it will likely raise your price by \$5 a plate.

Las 3B: Calle 21 % L y K; 832-9276; Miriam; \$\$ 🍷🍷 ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 ➡
The name comes from its 3 most celebrated characteristics: *Barato, Bueno y Bonito*. I have not eaten here, so can't confirm this. But give them a try. There is a B&B next door and *La Coppelia* ice cream palace is across the street.

Nerei: Calle 19, esq. L; \$\$ 🍷🍷 ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 🍷
This *paladar* is in a very central location and is housed in an amazing old mansion with the tables set out on the porch. The service seems slow, but there are often many diners. It is a good place to watch the hustle and bustle.

La Casa: Calle 30 #865 % 26 y 41; N. Vedado; 881-7000; Manolo & Silvia; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★ ★ ★ ☺ 🕒🕒 🍷
This is an elegant restaurant in the upscale neighborhood of Neuvo Vedado, near Plaza de la Revolución. It has deservedly been featured in a number of international food and travel magazines. Closed on Sundays.

Other *paladares* that have been recommended, but whose quality or even existence I can't confirm, include:

Le Chansonnier: Ave J #257 % 15 y Linea.

Monguito: Across the street from *Hotel Habana Libre*.

Balcón del Eden: Ave K % 19 y 21; 832-9113.

Miramar / Playa / Santa Fe

La Cocina de Lilliam: Calle 48 #1311 % 13 y 15; 209-6514; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★ ★ ★ ★ ☺ 🍷 🕒 🍷
A tropical dream! After President Jimmy Carter's visit here on May 13, 2002, this place has taken to promoting itself with the slogan: "Feel like the president for a night!" This place is located behind a high wall on an unassuming residential street in Playa. It has a large, tree-filled patio with tables spread out across the dining area in little, semi-private alcoves. The food is terrific and imaginatively prepared and the atmosphere is romantic and truly unforgettable. The prices range between \$8-\$11 per main dish, but given all the extras and scrumptious appetizers, beer, coffee, etc., expect to pay \$25 per person total. It is often full and is closed on Saturdays. Be warned that the strict hours of operation are just from 12-3 p.m. and 7-10 p.m. Call ahead for a reservation.

Mi Jardín: Calle 66 #517 esq. 5ta B; 203-4627; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟🌟 😊 🕒🕒

Located in a nice home in a very exclusive section of Miramar, this *paladar* is run by a very affable Mexican man from Michoacán. It is one of the only places you'll find authentic (or any) Mexican food in Havana. I recommend the chicken *mole poblano* or the *taquitos*. It also has excellent desserts like flan.

La Esperanza: Calle 16 #105, % 1a y 3a; 202-4361; Hubert and Manolo; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟 😊 🕒 🍷

Located just a half block from the "beach" in Miramar, this very elegant place is open only for dinner from 7:00 p.m. – 11:30 p.m. The living and dining rooms are very respectfully decorated and the staff is exceedingly professional. There is also a beautiful, plant-filled patio in the back. The server will recite a long, original menu to you getting your juices flowing. It has a very romantic atmosphere. Closed on Sundays.

La Fontana: Calle 3a #305 esq. Calle 46; 202-8337; Ernesto or Horacio; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟 😊 🕒🕒 ➡️ 🍷

A beautiful, extensive compound surrounded by a protective wall located in the shadow of the strange, rectangular-shaped tower of the Russian Embassy. The food is good and the atmosphere is very appealing with vine covered arbors, waterfalls, fish tanks, and ponds with turtles and goldfish. There is an open grill (parrillada) and a traditional Cuban country bungalow (bohío) in the back. There is even a spacious, air-conditioned English-style pub where you can drink and dine in relative private. There are a host of wild animals on the premises, including a friendly pelican named Pablo. The menu offers an extensive selection of foods and there is an impressive new bathroom facility. They even have a web-site where you can learn more and make reservations: www.lafontanahabana.com.

El Elegante: Ave. 33 #3410 % 34 y 36; Playa; 203-8215; Xiomara and Isidoro

The best mojito I have ever had (in Havana or elsewhere), bar none. Make sure the owners know that you've come on your own or your price will reflect a commission for your taxi-driver. There are a number of fixed-price items of international and Cuban fare, along with many other dishes. The owner tells me that they are open from 11 a.m. until mid-night but will open later if there are reservations. Be clear on the price before you dine. Air-conditioned.

Los Cactus de 33: Ave. 33 #3405 (bajos), % 34 y 36; Playa; 203-5139; Fernando

Literally just across the street from El Elegante, this place is also elegant but a bit pricey. However, prices may drop based on whether you enter with someone hoping to collect a commission. The menu show prices between \$15-\$22, but I imagine these are flexible. Open everyday from noon to midnight.

El Laurel: 5ta #26002 %260 y 262; Santa Fe; 209-7767; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟🌟 😊 🕒🕒 🍷

Though located very far out at the western extreme of Havana (actually in the community of Santa Fe), this *paladar* is a must-see. Exceedingly romantic, the dining area overlooks the channel and Marina Hemingway. The dining area is set up on extensive patio and backyard leading from the house to a private dock. At El Laurel you can walk in and actually choose your spot to dine and the waiters will pull a table and chairs out of storage and set them up just for you. Highly recommended and surprisingly cheap. The sign has been removed so keep your eyes open.

El Buganvil: Calle 190 #1501 e/ 15 y 17; 271-4791; Heriberto & Margarita; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟 🕒🕒 🍷

Hidden down at the end of a long, tunnel-like, tree-shaded street in the far west neighborhood of Siboney, this *paladar* lives up to its name as the dining area and neighborhood is full of vines and greenery. The food is quite good and the prices surprisingly low. If you want to have a real treat, call ahead a day or two and order the *Lechón Asado*, an entire rust suckling pig prepared in traditional Cuban style. A minimum of six persons is required for this culinary adventure. Open from noon to midnight and closed on Sundays.

Paladar Calle 10: Calle 10 #314 % 5ta y 3ra; Miramar; 209-6702 or 205-3970

Located at the entrance to Miramar in Calle 10, this *paladar* is hidden behind an elegant home, under a large thatched-roof bohío. Their specialty is food from the grill (parrillada) and surf & turf. Reservations recommended.

Vistamar: Calle 1ra #2206 % 22 y 24; Miramar; 203-8328; Armando or Berta; private parking

As the name suggests, the *paladar* provides a private, perfect view of the sea and even has a swimming pool at the food of the shore. Guests are allowed to have their food in the dining room or out on the romantic patio. More info is available on the web-site: www.cubascuba-thebook.com. Vistamar has been ranked among the 10 best *paladares*.

El Palio: 1a % 22 y 23

This *paladar* is located just one block down First Avenue from Vistamar. While it has no direct sea view, it does offer an elegant patio dining area adjacent to the sea.

Habana Vieja

La Mulata de Sabor!: Calle Sol #153A % Cuba y San Ignacio; Justina Sierra; (8)67-5984

One block from the *Plaza Vieja* in Old Havana, this place has good food at good prices. The hostess, Justina, is just what the name indicates - full of flavor and color, and even a little bit o' love!! This is a true family-run operation with little nieces and cousins running underfoot and music chiming in from the living room. Highly recommended.

Doña Eutimia: La Callejon de Chorro, just off of the Plaza de la Catedral; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟 😊 🕒 ➡️

Climb up a maze of staircases in this ruined building. You will find a small dining room with a unique view of Habana Vieja. An adventure waiting for you just off the Plaza de la Catedral!

La Julia: O'Reilly # 506-A % Bernaza y Villegas; 862-7438; Abel; \$\$ 🍷🍷 🌟🌟🌟 😊 🕒

A nice, family restaurant with good food and prices located in a residential area of Old Havana near Parque Central.

Sevillas: Obispo #455 % Aguacate y Villega; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★ 😊 🕒 🕒 ➡

Located on a balcony overlooking the main drag of Obispo Vieja. Pricey.

El Rincón de Elegguá: Aguacate #257 % Obispo y Obrapia

This place is hit or miss with quick service but mediocre food and atmosphere. Located ½ block off of Obispo.

Habana del Este

Doña Carmela: Comunidad #1, Casa 10, Habana del Este; 863-6048; Maceo y Beatriz

This place operates as both an "hostal" and a quite tasty *paladar*. Located a few blocks from *El Morro* on the east side of Havana Bay. Many foreign tour groups have recommended this place and the food is supposedly abundant.

Guanabo (Playas del Este / Santa Maria del Mar)

Piccolo Paladar: 5a Avenida % 502 y 504; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★ 😊 🕒 🕒 🍷

The perfect 'pizzeria Italiana' to dine after a long, sun-drenched day at the beach at Santa Maria del Mar. As the name indicates, this place specializes in Italian fare and offers pizzas, pastas, and good salads. Nicely decorated inside with flags from around the world and posters from all over Italy. The home itself is fascinating as it includes its own extensive garden from which much of the food comes.

Centro Habana

La Guarida: Concordia 418, % Gervasio y Escobar; Enrique; 862-4940; \$\$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★ 😊 🕒 🕒

This *paladar* is housed in the very same apartment where the sensational film '*Fresa y Chocolate*' was shot. The name, meaning 'the hideout,' is well chosen since the place is in the middle of non-touristy *Centro Habana* on the third floor of a building with no elevator. The trip is well worth it, however, given the ruined elegance of the building, the exquisite decoration of the *paladar*, the quality of the food, the friendly service, and the reasonable prices (\$9-\$12 per plate, side dishes extra). Rumor has it that these prices have risen considerably without any improvement in the quality of the food. It is closed between 3 and 7 p.m., does not serve lunch on the weekends, and closes during June, July, and sometimes August. Beware of sneaky hustlers who will try to divert your business to other mediocre *paladares* nearby. Also, be aware that some cabbies do not favor this place since they pay no commissions. Reservations are essential as the place is often overflowing even after 11 p.m. Highly recommended.

Adentro: Concordia % Gervasio y Escobar (just down the street from La Guarida)

I was tricked into dining in this aptly named *paladar* once when I had been turned away from La Guarida. Since La Guarida refuses to pay commissions, hustlers and taxi drivers will often tell you it is closed and lead you astray to a place where they can get their \$5-\$10 commission. While not nearly at the five-star level of La Guarida, this place is worth a visit for the reasonably priced and filling fare, as well as for the tour de force of classical 1970's Cuban kitsch that adorns the walls, the tables, and the jukebox!

Casa Isabel: Animas #661 % Lealtad y Escobar; 863-4656; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷🍷 ★★ 😊 🕒 🕒 🍷 🍷

This is actually a former *paladar* that has recently reopened as a Bed & Breakfast, but it is one of the few places in working class Centro Habana that will impress you and your tastes. Friendly and talented hosts.

Tien-Tan Restaurant: Cuchillo #17 % Zanja y San Nicolas (main drag in Barrio Chino); 861-5478; Tao Qi

This establishment boasts a chef direct from Shanghai and the talkative boss speaks fluent Chinese and broken English and Spanish!! The food is plentiful, inventive, inexpensive, and authentic. You can choose between authentic Chinese, Cuban-Chinese, and international dishes. You can e-mail them at: taoqi@net.cu.

Los Tres Chinitos (Chinese & Italian Restaurants): Barrio Chino; \$\$ 🍷🍷🍷 ★★ 😊 🕒 🕒 🍷

Both located on Dragones at #s 355 & 357 % Manrique y San Nicolas; 863-3388; Open 24 hours

Located in the heart of Havana's Chinatown, these pair of restaurants are not strictly *paladares*, but 'Chinese Societies,' ostensibly for 'members only.' However, you and your dollars will be welcomed. Strangely, the Italian restaurant is much better than the Chinese one and the prices are cheaper. They are popular, so make a reservation.

Centro Andaluz: Prado #104 e/ Genios y Refugio (near the Malecón); 863-6745

This is not strictly a *paladar*, but the Andalusian immigrants' cultural center founded on February 11, 1919. There is an excellent flamenco show here by the group *Flamenca Habana* twice a week and a few overly-loud and kitschy lounge/bolero acts that open the show. Best to skip these and show up for just the flamenco. The food is cheap, authentic, tasty, and filling. There is also a well-stocked bar. E-mail: maripili440@hotmail.com or mariadelpilar@cubacel.net. There is also a web page at: www.centro-andaluz.galeon.com.

I have not eaten in any of the 8 *paladares* below and cannot vouch for their food. It is also possible that some of them have been closed down recently. Call ahead if possible.

Torressón: Malecon #27 % Prado y Cárcel; 861-7476; Omar Torres
Confirmed to be open for business from noon-11 p.m. in August 2003.

Las Delicias del Consulado: Consulado #309 e/ Neptuno y Virtudes

Amistad de Lanzarote: Amistad # 211 % Neptuno y San Miguel; 863-6172; Ask for “Meri”
Confirmed to be open in August 2003. As they told me on the phone, “If there are clients, we work.”

Arriba de la Bola: San Lázaro #258 % Blanco y Galiano; 863-5513; Ask for “Porra” or “Anisia”
Named for a wildly famous salsa/timba tune from the early 1990’s by Manolin “El Medico de la Salsa,” a doctor turned pop singer, this place has been forced to close its doors. However, the owners assured me that they are still trying to stay “on the ball,” as the name indicates, by having their business license reinstated. Located just one block from the Malecon in the dusty, noisy, and oh-so-Cuban neighborhood of Central Havana, this place may have a room or two for rent. Call ahead.

Doña Rosario: San Lázaro #260 % Blanco y Galiano (near Italia).
Like its neighbor next-door, Doña Rosario has gone under. However, you never know in the world of the paladar.

Doña Blanquita: Prado #158 % Colón y Refugio

Bellamar: Virtudes #169 % Amistad y Industria

Santiago de Cuba

Salon Tropical: Fernández Marcané #310 (altos), e/ 9 y 10, Santa Bárbara; 64-11-61; Pascual and José
Everything is made to order “al momento” at this romantic rooftop *paladar* that looks out over the city.

Las Gallegas: Bartolomé Masó (San Basilio) #305 (altos), e/ San Pedro y San Félix; 62-47-00; Orta
Juicy pork & lamb are the house specialties at this family-run operation near the center off Parque de Céspedes.

La Caribeña: San Carlos #262 e/ San Pedro y Santo Tomás
Eating at this rooftop emporium is not only a culinary delight, but also a sociological experience. Great service!

Paladar Gildas: Bartolomé Masó (San Basilio) #116; Telephone: 2-2725

Paladar Doña Nelly: Pío Rosado #412 e/ Sánchez Hechavarría y Sagarra; 5-2195

Paladar del Chino: Calle 5ta e/ J y K, Reparto Sueño

I haven't been to these three and don't know if they are even still in operation, but give them a try.

Bed & Breakfasts / Casas Particulares

Price: \$ = \$10-\$15 \$\$ = \$15-\$25 \$\$\$ = \$25-\$35 \$\$\$\$ = >\$35
Room quality: 🏠 = OK 🏠🏠 = Good 🏠🏠🏠 = Great 🏠🏠🏠🏠 = excellent
Atmosphere: ★ = OK ★★ = Good ★★★ = Great ★★★★ = excellent
Other amenities: 🛀 = Luxurious 🍽️ = Food 🚗 = Taxi ❄️ = Air-conditioning 📞 = Telephone
 🏠 = Independent apartment ↪️ ① ② ③ ④ = Number of rooms available

It is very common for hosts to offer other amenities, such as more rooms for rent, than I have listed here. Be sure to ask. Although the prices in the rental business tend to range between \$20-\$30 for licensed, tax-paying hosts, these are often negotiable. Breakfast is also commonly offered as part of the rental arrangement, with other foods sometimes offered at a discount to boarders. Be sure to check on this before setting a price. Finally, some of these places may have lost their licenses recently. Others are still in the process of getting a license. In the tourism-thick areas of Havana, the fixed tribute/tax is \$250 and will likely increase, while the current \$100 tax for other areas of the city is rumored to increase to \$200. Partly for this reason, there are also a lot of clandestine B&Bs that are not listed here. Sleep light & speak easy! (I list a few places outside Havana. Paladares and B&Bs are outlawed in Varadero, but ask around, “*preguntando se llega a Roma!*”).

Preliminary reports in August, 2003, indicate that a new Housing Law (which regulates private rentals) has been approved and will take effect in January, 2004. Changes include: an increase in monthly tax rates, extra charges imposed for the common areas used by house-guests, a limit of two rooms to be legally rented, requiring all renters to pay the extra 30% for the right to offer food service to guests, revoking the right to rent out an entire apartment, and requiring that someone must always be home. Finally, while the government has always had an antagonistic approach toward the private sector, this new law has been lobbied for most vigorously by foreign investors in hotel chains. It seems that by making deals with the government, they can secure a monopoly over the hotel industry and have the state make laws that will effectively enforce that monopoly. Who would have thought that capitalists and communists would make such good partners!!

El Vedado

Silvia: Infanta #17 apto. 9, % 23 y Humboldt, La Rampa; 879-3130; \$\$ 🏠🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ ❄️ 📞 ↪️ ①
 This is the perfect place to bring your mother. I did and she loved the warm hospitality of the owner-operator couple Silvia and Miguel. Their home is quite centrally located at the intersection of 23rd and Infanta where they run into the Malecón (actually in the Cayo Hueso section of Centro Habana, but located in the heart of La Rampa). The bedroom has two double beds, a refrigerator, a large dresser and closet, and a powerful air-conditioner all at your disposal. The bathroom is for your private use and always very clean. The neighbors are friendly and if you need to practice your Spanish, Silvia will be happy to talk with you in her rapid Cuban Spanish, though her English is getting quite good. Note the new e-mail: salvarezmolina@yahoo.com.

Julio & Leo: Calle 19 #376 apt. 15A % G y H; 832-8968; \$\$ 🏠🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ ↪️ ①
 Located just off 23rd on “G” (Presidentes), this place is the envy of all my friends in Havana. It has a 15th floor view of the sweeping western part of Havana including a good part of the Malecón. Try 1, 11, & 16B, and 10 & 13A.

Amparo & Roberto: Linea #53 % M y N, piso 2; 832-7003; \$\$ 🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ 🍽️ ❄️ 📞 ↪️ ①

Alicia: Linea #53 % M y N, piso 9; 832-8439; \$\$ 🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ ❄️ 📞 ↪️ ①

At the foot of Linea near the Maine Monument, U.S. Interest Section, and new José Martí “Protest-o-drome,” each of these two apartments a single bedroom for rent. Breakfast can often be included in the deal. Like most other B&B owner-operators, the hosts of these two homes are university educated professionals (two doctors and two university professors). Food for thought and conversation.

Habitaciones Don Pepe: Calle 15 #58 % M y N; 832-6183; \$\$ 🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ 🍽️ ❄️ 📞 ↪️ ①




Just across the street from the above pair, you will find Don Pepe, a practicing doctor of sports medicine. He runs a tight ship and is well known for his centrally located B&B. Other amenities available.




Carlos & Nelson: Calle E # 609 % 25 y 27; 832-7203; \$\$\$ 🏠🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ 🍽️ ❄️ 📞 ↪️ ③



A terrific second floor restored home just above 23rd near Marina Grajales Park. Breakfast is available for a bit extra and there are three rooms to choose from each with its own bathroom. Theatre people through-and-through, Carlos and Nelson have re-decorated this place with a flair for style and have recaptured much of its past beauty. The roof is filled with plants and provides a nice view & breeze on those hot Havana nights.



Mercedes: Calle 21 #360, Apt 2-A % G y H; 832-5846; \$\$ 🏠🏠🏠 ★★ ★★ 🍽️ ❄️ 📞 ↪️ ②




This comfortable family home offers two well-equipped bedrooms. Each room has a small refrigerator and TV, as well as a very clean, private bathroom with hot and cold water available 24 hours-a-day. Mercedes works hard to keep her guests happy and has built up a solid reputation for her pampering. E-mail her at: mercylupe@hotmail.com




Fernando & Luis: Calle 25 #1163 apt2, e/ 8y10; 830-6983; Margarita; \$\$    ★ ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📺 📶
For those looking for a clean, private, well-equipped apartment of your own at a reasonable price this is for you (sblanco52@hotmail.com). This one-bedroom apartment is comfortable and centrally located.




Melba: Calle 2 # 212 (altos) % Linea y 11; 832-5929; \$\$    ★ ★ ★ 📺 ❄️ 📞 📶
On the second floor of an old Vedado mansion, this family home offers three good-size rooms (one with its own balcony). A world-class breakfast is also an option. Other amenities are available.

MariaElena: Calle Jovellar #313 apto. 6, % M y N; 878-3887 or 829-6257; \$\$   ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📺 📶
Another single apartment a block and a half from the university, this place comes equipped with a stocked kitchen, a small dining area, a small bedroom, and a smaller balcony overlooking busy Jovellar street.

Jorge Felix Martínez: Calle 562 % 23 y 25; 833-7614; \$\$   ★ ★ 📺 ❄️ 📶
This place comes recommended to me, but I have not visited or stayed here.

Perla: Nuevo Vedado; 829-7628; \$\$\$\$    ★ ★ 📺 📶 📞 📺 📶
This large, modern two story home has dedicated its entire first floor to its house-guests. You actually enter the house unknowingly on the second floor and have to descend to the first. There you will find three or four large nicely furnished rooms from which to choose, each with its own upscale bathroom. Outside there is a wide back porch with a bar, a swimming pool, a fountain, and a large yard. This place stands above many others with these amenities as it does with its \$60 per night price tag. Has parking-garage.




La Palma: Jovellar #305 % M y N; Eloisa; 878-3488; \$\$    ★ ★ ★ 📺 ❄️ 📞 📶
These two places are described above in the *Paladar* section. Both of them started out as *paladares* and moved into the B&B business recently. They offer between 2-4 rooms at relatively fair prices especially given the luxury found therein. Marpoly offers a plethora of extra amenities including extensive menus, transportation, a parking garage, and much more. La Palma is moderately priced while Marpoly tends to get quite expensive if your tastes run high.



Marpoly: Calle K #154 % Linea y 11; 832-2471; \$\$\$    ★ ★ ★ ★ 📺 📶 📞 📶
These two places are described above in the *Paladar* section. Both of them started out as *paladares* and moved into the B&B business recently. They offer between 2-4 rooms at relatively fair prices especially given the luxury found therein. Marpoly offers a plethora of extra amenities including extensive menus, transportation, a parking garage, and much more. La Palma is moderately priced while Marpoly tends to get quite expensive if your tastes run high.




Migdalia & Celia Novo: Calle 15 #910 % 6 y 8; 833-6832; e-mail: merlyngonzalez76@hotmail.com
This house has a private entrance, a covered garage, air conditioning, hot water, and an alarm. Two rooms are available and the hosts offer optional breakfast and laundry services. The room comes equipped with use of a phone, TV, and stereo system. Prices are \$35 per room or \$50 for the entire house.



Olga & Jorge Luis: Calle A #663 % 27 y 29; home phone: 835-6053, mobile: 264-4123
This home offers two rooms, each with air conditioning, hot water, and the use of a phone and TV. There is also an independent entrance with a garage. Food service can be included. Prices are \$30 for one room and \$50 for both.



Centro Habana

Casa Isabel: Animas # 661 % Lealtad y Escobar; 863-4656; \$\$    ★ ★ ★ ★ 📺 ❄️ 📞 📶
Isbel is a very friendly former music professor who got into the B&B business recently after closing down the paladar she ran from her home. Surprisingly for Centro Habana, her place is in mint condition especially since a fire nearly destroyed the house next door last year. You'll find a very pleasant breezeway open to the sky, a comfortable living area with a bar where breakfast can be had. The room is comfortable and has three beds to handle larger groups. You can even ask Isbel to play a song for you on the piano.



Manolo: Neptuno #970 1er piso, % Hospital y Aramburu; 879-9205; \$\$   ★ ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📶
A few years ago Manolo converted his second floor home into a Cuban barbacoa. This means that he divided the back half of the place in two horizontally. Given the original 18-foot ceilings this doubled his floor space. Now he lives upstairs with his family and rents out the wide, comfortable downstairs.

Martín: Jovellar #110 apt13 % Espada y Hospital; 830-3637 or 878-7109; \$\$    ★ ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📶
Located on the edge of Centro Habana near Infanta and the Malecon, this is a comfortable two bedroom apartment. It is completely furnished and has air-conditioned rooms. Your privacy will be respected.

Ilasema Pérez: San Francisco 265 Apt #212 e/ Neptuno y S. Miguel; 867-5451; \$\$\$   ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📶
Ila, the intrepid owner of this establishment let me know of her business through the internet. Who says Cuba is isolated from the rest of the world! *Ya no*. She offers a single room with a TV, stereo, phone, fridge, kitchen with stove, air conditioning, hot and cold water, and a balcony that opens onto the street.

Ariel López: T. Blanco #252 % Asunción y Dren, Luyanó; 899-2875; \$\$   ★ ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📶
A great out-of-the-way place great for a small group of friends or two couples. Ariel and Maria are great hosts and very cultured. This is a multi-lingual household full of former language teachers. All amenities.

Miramar

José Fernández & Eva Camero: Calle 27 #2213 e/ 22 y 26; 209-3058; \$\$   ★ ★ ★ ❄️ 📞 📶
This B&B is located in a residential area of Miramar, near the Almendares River. Eva does a great job of making her guests feel welcome & comfortable. She also has talent at preparing tasty meals for her guests. There is a great covered rooftop dining area and a spacious backyard. José & Eva are true entrepreneurs who run a tight operation.

Lodging in other cities

** For fast, efficient, relatively inexpensive bus travel from Havana check out Viazul @ 881-1413 **

Santiago de Cuba

Odalys Cardero: Moncada #222 % Habana y Maceo; 5-2349; \$   ★ ★      ②







This place is in the old section of town, walking distance from most of the major sites. The family is very friendly and the two rooms (one with two beds and one with one) are fine. The bathroom is a bit tight.

Nereyda: Garzón #310 Apt 1, % 1 y 2, Santa Bárbara; 2-7598; \$   ★ ★ ★     ①

One has access to a semi-private entrance and exclusive use of the bathroom. The family is very friendly even if the bed is a bit too lumpy and the noise from the street is sometimes a bit too much. Price is right.

Edgardo Gutiérrez Cobas: Calle Terraza #106 e/ 1ra y 5ta, Reparto Ampliación de Terrazas; 0226-42536

Viñales

Benito Rojas Matos: 08-93261; Magdalena; \$    ★ ★ ★    ①

Benito and his wife are just about the nicest people you could hope to meet in this quaint little burgeoning tourist town. The prices are low and the food is especially good, far superior than you can get in the few state restaurants in town. The room is large and can accommodate anywhere from 2-5 people.

María Antonia Díaz: Salvador Cisnero Interior #5 Apt 9; \$\$    ★ ★    ①

Just a name I picked up at the bus terminal. If Benito is full you might try here.

Driver: Paco; 93-6060 or 9-3717; Give him a call if you need a ride around town, to the mogotes and caves, to the beautiful Cayo Jutias, or just about anywhere else in the vicinity.

Jardín Botánico – Jardín de las Hermanas Caridad y Carmen Miranda:

(Calle Salvador Cisneros #5, at the turn in the road just as you leave the main drag) This is an impressive garden with literally thousands of plants and fruits. The typical tour ends with an opportunity to gorge oneself on all the fruits in the garden and write ones name permanently on the wall. Be careful of the Tree of Knowledge in the center of the garden! Also, keep an eye open for the baby dolls hanging all about!

Holguín

Aurora Ferriol Arencibia: Martí #102 % Morales Lemus y Narciso; 46-1191; \$  ★ ★     ①

Centrally located near the main square. The large bedroom is equipped with a powerful air-conditioner.

Trinidad

Pedro Aliz Pena: Gustavo Izquierdo #127 (Gloria) % Piro Guinari y Simon Bolivar; tel: 3025

Surfing (the web) in Cuba

Access to the internet in Cuba for the visitor (and for the Cuban as well) is limited. However, this is changing rather rapidly for dollar-paying customers, despite continued restrictions for average Cubans. I have only found one reliable 'public' access source: The Capitolio. Here, you have two options. You can enter the library on the south side from the front of the building and wait in a line (usually 30-45 minutes) to use one of the 5-6 computers. This costs \$5 an hour. The server is quite slow by international standards. You can also go in the main entrance and take a number at the Capitolio's 'Internet Café'. This is the same price, but gives you the option of eating while you wait or even leaving for a while since your place in line is marked by your number, not your body. There is rumored to be another internet café in Habana Vieja. Ask around.

Another location where internet access is rumored to be available is the in the library of the Centro Cultural de España on the Malecón near La Punta. However, this has recently been suspended due to friction between the Spanish and Cuban governments. A final option is one of the many luxury hotels throughout Havana. The Business Center in most major hotels provides internet access to both guests and visitors, but at steep prices. For example, the Hotel Nacional has 4-5 fairly fast computers that can be used for \$4 per each 15 minutes. The Meliá Cohiba (Vedado), Meliá Habana (Miramar), Havana Libre (Vedado), and Inglaterra (Centro Habana) also provide this service at a similar price. Others are coming on line *poco a poco*. Good luck!

Havana Sights and Night Life

‘La Torre’ Bar and Restaurant (Focsa Building, Calle 17 % M y N, Vedado) The best panoramic view of Havana bar-none. Have a drink here and take in the city and the Gulf Stream.

Roof Bar of Hotel Ambos Mundos (End of Obispo at Plaza de Armas) Provides a great view of Habana Vieja. You can combine a drink on the roof bar with a visit to Hemingway’s old room #511.

Roof Bar of Museum of Natural History (End of Obispo at Plaza de Armas) Provides a great view of the Harbor and offers good Piña Coladas, Mojitos, and Daiquiris all at a fair price.

Casa de la Amistad (Paseo % 17 y 19, Vedado) Great live concerts are performed on Tuesday evenings starting at 9 pm. Part of the \$5 per person cover can be applied to drinks. This place also has a great dance floor!!

Casa de la Trova (San Lazaro # 661; 879-3373) This place is the real McCoy. It has live Cuban folk music (son, trova, nueva trova, and feelin’) from Thursday thru Sunday evenings beginning at 7 p.m. There is no bar or restaurant but drinks are welcome (BYOB). It is free, but performers appreciate tips. Hours & quality sporadic.

El Hurón Azul (UNEAC) (Calle 17 y H, Vedado; 832-4551) This is the UNEAC (Union of Cuban Writers and Artists) cultural center. It is housed in an old mansion and has a very attractive side patio where music is occasionally performed. Catch the Bolero show (ballads) on Saturday evenings from 9 pm on. Also be sure to catch the peña of Afro-Cuban dance and music on Wednesdays at 5 p.m. Admission is \$5 for foreigners/tourists. In the back of the building there is also a “cinemateca / salon de video” where a variety of surprisingly recent films (many from the US) are shown. Lifetime membership in the video club is 10 pesos (.50¢) and movies cost 2 pesos each (.10¢, yes, ten cents!). Stop by to get a schedule of showings.

Callejón de Hamel (Off of San Lázaro % Animas y Soledad, Centro Habana; 878-1661) Catch the colorful murals and the Carnavalesque rumba dance-jam here on Saturdays & Sundays. Other activities during the week.

Casa de la Cultura de la Habana Vieja (Aguiar #509; 863-4860) Often over-crowded with many eager jinetero/as, this open-air dance patio in Habana Vieja has live music on most nights from 7 p.m. on. The entrance fee is fairly cheap between \$2-\$3, and very cheap for Cubans since they pay just 2-3 pesos. Drinks are served from two bars in the patio but watch out for 'false friends'.

Casa de la Musica (Av 35 y Calle 20, Miramar; 204-0447) Run by Cuba’s national recording company Egrem, this place has excellent but pricey concerts & free afternoon jam sessions. Also has a good selection of CDs for sale.

El Comodoro (Calle 1 y 84, Miramar; 204-5551) Fashionable dance club with pricey drinks & hordes of touts.

El Tunel (10 de Octubre) Ask around La Coppelia as to the location of this ‘far out’ dance club that was originally designed to be a fall-out bunker when the Yanquis attack again.

Papa’s (Marina Hemingway Disco) (West of Havana near Santa Fe; 204-6336) A great disco with a live floorshow and open dance floor. The \$10 per person cover includes all-you-can-drink!!

Piano Bar “Delirio Habanero” (Paseo y 39) On the third floor of the Teatro Nacional building on the Plaza de la Revolución, this place has live music and a variety show from Tuesday thru Saturday nights. The \$5 cover can be applied to drinks from the bar. The live music is good and the dance floor is open following the show.

Jazz Café (in the shopping center across from Hotel Meliá Cohiba) This place has great live jazz music on weekends and some weeknights. It has good food and drinks and there’s no cover except that you are required to spend \$10 minimum per couple (consumo mínimo). Watch out for hustlers and jineteras.

Jazz Club La Zorra y El Cuervo (23rd y O, Vedado; 866-2402) Open nightly at 10 p.m. with a cover of \$5-10. Check the board outside to see what the line up holds for that evening.

Amor’s “Peña de Elda” (Calle 23 #759, 3rd floor, % B y C; 833-8150) This place is located on the *azotea* (roof). Hundreds of people jammed and jamming to good times, cheesy comedy routines, lounge singers, and Cuban son. This musical celebration only takes place on first Sunday of each month from 2-6 p.m. No alcohol.

El Gato Tuerto (Calle O % 17 y 19) Once a famous hang-out for Cuban poets and intellectuals, the ‘one-eyed cat’ is now a renovated bar-restaurant catering to the tourist clientele issuing from the nearby Hotel Nacional. Despite all this, it still has a great musical show that features some of Cuba’s classic boleros and sones. Surprisingly, the drinks are not overpriced (not sure about the food).

Macumba Habana (Calle 222, esq. 37, La Coronela, La Lisa; 303-0568) Open every evening from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. The cover is normally \$10 per person and on weekends this goes up to \$15 per head. This has become THE place to go out lately in Havana (of course, if you have dollars). It can get a bit sticky with jineteras. Drinks are priced above average, but the place is one of a kind with a memorable floorshow, a great ‘animador,’ and dancing ‘till the wee hours.

El Cañonazo (La Cabaña; across the bay from Habana Vieja) Each night at 9 p.m. Cuban soldiers reenact the colonial cannon firing that signaled the closing of the harbor. Take a cab (and a significant other) over and try to catch the ferryboat back across the harbor. \$3-\$5 fee.