

Rhythms of Cuba with Andre Mallinger and Karen Immerso November 8-19, 2017

Trip Itinerary

Cuba is a relaxed and spontaneous country, which means that things can change with little notice. Local musicians and event schedules are often unavailable by email and internet, and many things are difficult to arrange in advance. Which makes this real-life, street-level travel, with many of the fun, unplanned happenings that occur when you're traveling in alignment with the local culture. Karen and Andre will be in Havana prior to your arrival, and will make many of our arrangements at that time. Whenever possible, we will have local Cubans serve as guides for our music performances and activities. This itinerary reflects our schedule as closely as possible, although some activities or classes may be replaced by similar ones.

DAY ONE- Wednesday, November 8

Fly to Havana. We'll get settled in our adjoining Casa Particulares- small bed and breakfasts run by local couples and families. We'll be staying in the Vedado district, the cultural heart of the city that hosts numerous music and theater venues, where 19th century colonial mansions blend with tall buildings of the 1950s era. After dinner in a small open-air restaurant, we'll celebrate with an introduction to Cuban music at the famous El Gato Tuerto, a club known for its bolero, trova, jazz, and interesting mix of locals and foreigners.



DAY TWO - Thursday



In the morning we'll walk to the Callejon de Hamel, a small pedestrian road in Central Havana that is a hot spot of Afro-Cuban culture. The alley is the best place in Havana for street art, and is the center of the [Santeria](#) religion, the uniquely Cuban blend of African, Caribbean, and Catholic religious beliefs that is reflected in most Afro-Cuban drumming. We'll meet with an expert in Santeria practices to learn about the deities, rituals, and costumes that we will be seeing enacted in music and dance. We may catch some of the street rumba and dancing that the Callejon is known for.

In the afternoon we'll have our first conga drumming workshop with teachers from the Havana School of Music. We'll start with the foundation of good technique, including the heel-palm stroke that is fundamental to Cuban drumming. Afterwards, we'll have a discussion about the lifestyle and musical opportunities available for Cuban musicians. In the evening we'll catch an early show of Cuban son- the style of music made popular by the Buena Vista Social Club.

DAY THREE- Friday

In the morning we'll meet with a local guide to explore the classically Cuban narrow streets and beautiful plazas of Old Havana, taking in the historical significance of this city center unlike any other in the world.

After lunch at a neighborhood restaurant we'll meet with musicologist Olavo Alen Rodriguez, PhD, in the living room of his house in a suburb of Havana. Olavo Alen has lectured all over the world about Cuban music and how it has impacted and been influenced by global music and historical events. In the evening we will go out for a concert at a local theater.



DAY FOUR- Saturday



This morning we visit the [Conjunto Folklorico](#), the national center for Cuba's most accomplished folkloric dancers, who travel around the world to showcase traditional Cuban music and dance. We will take a rumba dance class from one of the Conjunto dancers, to learn the basic moves that go with this lively and sensual dance. Then we will meet with the director of the company, to have a discussion about the mission of Conjunto Folklorico, and the training of the country's elite dancers. If they are available, members of the company will perform a private show for us.

We'll have lunch in a small paladar (a family owned restaurant) run in the front of a beautiful colonial house, and spend some time talking with one of the family members about his contemporary, politically satirical artwork. We may be able to visit other artists' studios in the same neighborhood. After lunch, we will return to the beautiful courtyard at Conjunto Folklorico for the Saturday afternoon 'El Gran Palenque', a rumba fiesta packed with locals celebrating the weekend, and featuring several different rumba bands and dancing groups.

Tonight we will go to a performance in one of Havana's many beautiful concert halls.

DAY FIVE- Sunday

In the morning, we'll visit the Havana School of Music for an engaging afternoon singing workshop with [Joanne de la Torre Corpas](#), an excellent teacher and chair of the Musicology Department at the Instituto de Superior Artes, Havana's well-known school of art and design.

In the late afternoon we'll visit the lovely, plant-filled outdoor courtyard of UNEAC, the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, for their Sunday evening show of son or rumba music.



DAY SIX- Monday

In the morning, we will meet with [Obini Bata](#), an all-women's band who were the first women in Cuba to play the hour-glass shaped bata drums, a role traditionally restricted to men. Obini Bata has toured all over the world as a government sponsored professional group. We will learn the drumming, dancing, and singing parts to a traditional song, and then spend some time talking with them about the practice of music and dance in our respective countries.

In the afternoon we'll visit the spectacular art museums in Havana Vieja, and then return to our Casa Particulares where we'll be treated to dinner by one of our hosts.

DAY SEVEN- Tuesday

We'll start off in the morning with a salsa dancing class, in a dance studio in the narrow, lively residential streets of Havana Centro. You'll have the afternoon to explore Havana on your own- visiting art museums, galleries, or just sitting in a plaza or on the malecon.



DAY EIGHT- Wednesday

In the afternoon we'll leave Havana, taking comfortable transportation to [Valle Vinales](#), approximately a three-hour trip. Valle Vinales is a rural town surrounded by deep green tobacco fields and unusual rock formations called 'mogotes', steep sided towers that rise nearly 1,000' from the valley floor. We'll stay in a set of adjoining Casa Particulares on a quiet dirt road surrounded by tobacco fields and oxen, with horse drawn carts and caballeros trotting by the front porches. Each of our three nights in Vinales we'll gather for dinner hosted by one of our Casa families.

DAY NINE- Thursday



Today we will visit the organic farm of Antonio, one of our casa hosts. Antonio's farm has an incredibly diverse number of crops, including tobacco, papaya, yucca, and many others. Antonio will explain the sustainable farming practices that he and most Cuban farmers use, and talk about the economy and politics the small-scale, local farming that is prevalent in Cuba.

In the evening, after dinner with our hosts, we'll visit the local Casa de la Cultura for a small-town musical performance.

DAY TEN- Friday

Valle Vinales holds one of Cuba's most well-known National Parks, and has recently been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today a park ranger will join us for a three-hour hike through the magotes, visiting a fruit farmer along the way for a snack of coconut and papaya. In the afternoon we'll visit a family that grows sugar cane and learn about how the cane is squeezed into juice by hand. We'll conclude with a visit to the family that has been running the Vinales Botanical Garden for generations, and wander through their small paradise of organically grown orchids, fruit trees, and medicinal plants.



DAY ELEVEN- Saturday

Today we will return to Havana and our Casa Particulares, in time for a visit to the National Museum of Bella Arts in the afternoon. We'll celebrate our last night in Cuba with a final music or dance performance, possibly by Obini Bata, who we studied with earlier in the week.

DAY TWELVE- Sunday, November 19

This morning we will say goodbye to our Casa hosts and begin the journey home.