

CHAI MISSIONS CUBAN ADVENTURE

APRIL 19 TO 27, 2015

Exclusive Expeditions is a division of CHAI Missions



IT ALL BEGAN AT THE MIAMI
SHERATON...

DAY 1 ... Sunday 4-19-2015

At seven p.m. on April nineteen,
We were all called together by Rhonda the Queen!
Time for our pre-departure meet-and-greet
Which was informative, fun, friendly, and sweet.
The food was plentiful, mojitos flowed,
New friendships began, talk never slowed.
Then came the formalities, no fanfare and fuss
As Rhonda introduced each one of us.
And after we each had taken a turn
Telling why we were here, what we hoped we would learn...
Rhonda gave us all a wonderful overview
Of the sights we would see and the things we would do,
Of the people we'd meet and the food that we'd eat,
And the music and art that we'd find such a treat.



MANANA!

DAY 2 ... Monday 4-20-2015

We all met at breakfast, bright and early --
Talking about humidity and hair frizzed and curly!
Then we marched to the lobby which was loaded with bags,
All shapes and sizes boasting "Chai Missions" tags!
We boarded the shuttle and headed for the port --
Facing overweight charges of every sort!
Then our flight was delayed: storm in the sky.
But perky Rhonda did her best to keep spirits high.
We finally touched down in Cuba at 3:35
To applause and hoorays and all that jive!
We met Manny, our guide, and his bright blue bus...
And learned about customs, Che Guevara, Cuba and – us!
In Cienfuegos, we met Rebecca Rodriguez, a remarkable Jew...
Where Alice gave her a check from our Chai Missions crew.
Then to Jagua Hotel: a capella concert, lobster dinner, & salsa sound.
Tomorrow: Pre-natal Clinic, yes we're Trinidad-bound!



DAY 3 ... Tuesday 4-21-2015

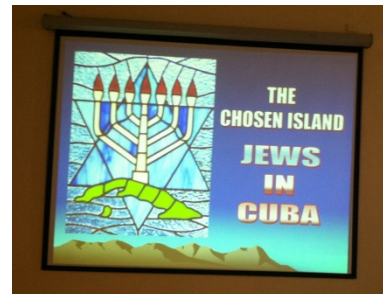
Though Rhonda offered this journal job, it still remains mine.
Not one other person else is waiting in line!
The drive from Cienfuegos to Trinidad...
Indeed was long but not at all bad.
We passed mango orchards, sugar cane fields, and in the sky
Dark smoke from Karl Marx Cement billowed high.
And on the road, some commuters were in luck
As a "yellow man" piled them all into a truck.
Although Trinidad is sad and poor and crumbling,
The pre-natal clinic was quite touching and humbling.
The town of Cienfuegos is charming, teatro entertaining,
The plaza was quite busy and no one was complaining.
From there to a gallery where some of us bought art
Very quickly, may I add, for we had to depart!
6pm, t'was time for the Chai Missions cruise –
ALL ABOARD – let's move it, American Jews!
Sunset cruise relaxing, Lagarto dinner divine,
Tomorrow Havana! Depart a quarter to nine.



Packed up, checked out, we're on our way –
Bay of Pigs museum filled many with dismay.
Bad decisions, attack, no looking back...
Russia/Venezuela, another huge crack.
We departed with hopes that Cuba will rise
Above its troubles and years of demise.
A lovely lunch, we each licked our plate...
And then onto the Hemmingway estate.
An amazing tribute to an amazing man's life...
Left intact by his widow (his number 4 wife).
A visit to El Patronato Synagogue to meet "the one and only Adela"
Whose stories were topped only by a downpour needing a massive umbrella!
Finally got to the very-well-air-conditioned Meliá Cohiba to rest --
Then off to dinner at the Nacional Hotel whose legend is best.
This hotel is an icon, its old beauty is charming...
Dinner was lovely, its history is disarming.



DAY 5 ... Thursday 4-23-2015



Another breakfast, another buffet,

Another hot and humid day!

We gathered in a meeting room

The a/c was blasting (so no doom and gloom)!

Noted historian, Maritza Corrales, took us through the Jewish course –

An impressive history we are proud to endorse.

Her fascinating presentation started with the 1st Cuban Jew,

A *converso*, who stepped onto this island in 1492.

Then we stopped at a cigar factory where inhumane conditions were the scoop –

NOT for the workers BUT for our Chai Missions group!!!

We learned a lot about cigars & what shocked us on Chai Missions:

Cigar workers earn more than teachers and physicians!

Had pizza and pasta for lunch which we ate happily...

Mostly because the restaurant had excellent a/c!!

Dinner was fine but what rated quite high

Was entertainment under the nighttime sky:

The Tropicana show was spectacular and fun,

Splashy, colorful, and enjoyed by everyone.



DAY 6 ... Friday 4-24-2015

This morning was very somber indeed,
As we entered a cemetery, dry with weed.
Our kin from Europe and Cuba, their resting place...
We mourned them, praying for eternal grace.
From there to the inspiring views of Havana Bay
Where beauty unfolds from every which way.
After lunch, a trip to an innovative art gallery
Exploding with creative works, wonderful to see.
And must not forget the "chotchka mart"
Where we could buy authentic bargain art!!
Touching shabbot service at Patronato, dinner, and then
FREE DAY TOMORROW – GOOD NIGHT AND AMEN!!!



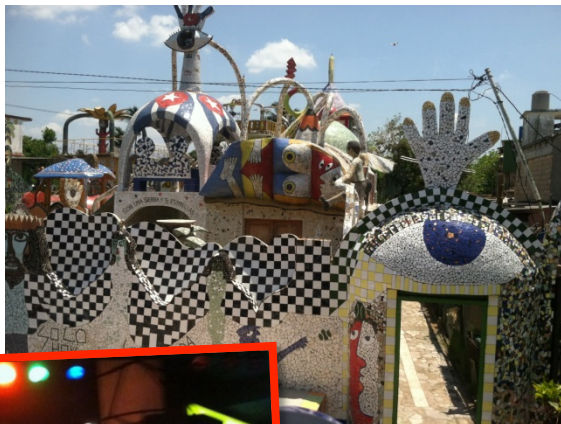
DAY 7 ... Saturday 4-25-2015

The heat's overbearing, we're totally dropping
But today's our free day so there's no way we're stopping.
Some are independently exploring, some nursing infections,
Others are with Manny checking fine art collections.
For dinner, most joined Rhonda at a place called Elite
Where the ambience was modern and the food a trendy treat.
Wine flowed very freely so we weren't too alert:
When lobster appetizer had strawberries – we thought it was dessert!
Entrees were amazing, service was quite gracious...
We ate so much the cabs back seemed a less spacious!



DAY 8 ... Sunday 4-26-2015

Our last day, still no relief from the heat...
But we continued with sweat and swollen feet!
A tour of Bellas Artes Museum (a/c broke, no joke!), back to bus
To Ethel & Julius Rosenberg Monument which shocked most of us.
Next stop: a park honoring John Lennon, the music and the man,
Where the Cubans continue to honor him as much as they can.
Lovely lunch and happy music then a fascinating stop
At Jose Rodriguez Fuster's home studio where creations just pop!
Tiles in every color, every form, every shape
Had us mesmerized, eyes open, mouths agape.
So much humor, so much style ...
This Caribbean Picasso made everyone smile.
Back home for rest, showers and lots of a/c ...
Meet at seven for dinner and our grand finale.
Dinner was elegant, no doubt that's for sure-a
Followed by Joan's birthday cake and a giant hora!
Then off to see Buena Vista Social Club show...
Fantastic! The perfect ending! What a way to go!



DAY 9 ... Monday 4-27-2015

Our luggage was put out by 4am,
Needless to say getting up was mayhem.
This morning was indeed bittersweet,
Hit the buffet early for something to eat.
We bid farewells and then got on the bus
Realizing there was much shared amongst us:
Michelle's big fall and Wayne's big save
(He was a hero and she was so brave).
Then Wayne got sick and Sue stayed by his side
(Who knew she was such a devoted bride?!)
We shared two birthdays, Rob's and Joan's,
Where families couldn't reach them on phones!
As for swollen ankles, hands down: Barbara and Bunni,
(Though we marveled at them, it really wasn't funny!)
The trip was wonderful in every possible way...
From the insights Manny was able to convey
To everything we saw and did and felt
From the people we met to the shuls we gave gelt.
In a word -- From Day One to Day Eight:
Every single moment was "GREAT!!"