

WHERE TO STAY

MUSCAT | MELIÁ SERENGETI LODGE | ARIZONA MUSE



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Quirky décor in La Reserva. **Opposite:** Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski La Habana



HOT IN HAVANA

From revived former residences to a once-grand shopping arcade, quirky boutique hotels are popping up in Cuba's capital

“EACH ROOM IS TACKLED BY A DIFFERENT CUBAN DESIGNER CELEBRATING ONE OF HAVANA’S ECLECTIC ARCHITECTURAL ERAS, FROM ART DECO TO MID-CENTURY”

PASEO 206

The original owner of this house lost it in a risky card game – a gamble that has paid off for visitors as it’s now one of the most elegant of Havana’s small clutch of boutique hotels. Its 10 suites come with features like sunbathing terraces and Jacuzzis. Done up in Thirties style with Carrara-marble fireplaces and elegant staircases, it’s strong on details: Acqua di Panna by the beds, Frette linen, furniture by Gio Ponti and Stilnovo, Hermès toiletries, spa services on demand and Cuban art by Carlos Guzman. Chic Italian restaurant Eclectic attracts expats and discerning Cubans for its fresh Italian fare, which makes use of locally produced mozzarella and ricotta – fitting, as the hotel was created by Italian-Cuban duo Andrea and Diana Gallina. Set in the handsome, Republican-era district of Vedado, Paseo 206 is the coolest address on an aristocratic avenue that sweeps down to the sea, away from more febrile, touristic areas defined by hustle and hassle. It is, Andrea argues, the “real” Havana. *Doubles from AED 1,025; 0053-7831 3423, paseo206.com*

MALECÓN 663

The “third baby” of elegant Marseillaise Sandra Esposito and La Charanga Habanera-drummer Orlando Mengual, it took three years to transform a decrepit but imposing 1912 sea-facing townhouse into a quirky little haven. The four-bedroom *piéd-à-terre* exudes a stage-set theatricality unique in Havana, with dramatic ocean views. It’s a giraffe of a building, a characterful, multi-storied delight. Décor is eccentric and colourful, each room tackled by a different Cuban designer celebrating one of Havana’s eclectic architectural eras since 1912, from Art Deco to Mid-Century – but united in embracing local artisanship and materials. The suite, taking up a whole floor, stands out with a built-in bath, outside living room, terrace and bar. Upcycling is celebrated: above a bed hangs a paper lamp decorated with a hundred paperclips; from gas canisters and soft-drink crates to ring pulls, discarded objects become art or beautiful utilitarian pieces. Spoiling breakfasts feature rarities such as cinnamon bread and green juice. *Doubles from AED 660; 0053-7860 1459, malecon663.com*

LOMA DEL ÁNGEL

There’s a little patch of Habana Vieja (Old Havana) that feels a lot like Seville, and here you’ll find a five-way crossroads of sorts called “Cinco Esquinas”. This is the home of Loma del Ángel, a jewel-box, two-bedroom hotel that offers all the enchantment of the old town in a carefully constructed, aromatic, tranquil and personalised package. From the moment you walk in, everything, from the scented candles and fragrant fresh flowers, to the sweetness of the concierge and the beauty of its *objets d’art* – not to mention the pumping Wi-Fi signal – smacks of ease, refinement and charm. The owner is Spanish, and with Barcelona-based interior designer Federico Crocella, worked with studio Wunderkammer Barcelona to design nearly everything in the hotel on-site, from the furniture (which ranges from French-inspired repro to Indian-inspired rattan) to the taps. The palette is monochromatic but feels anything but, enlivened by flashes of bougainvillea, tropical fruit bowls and eclectic artefacts. Check in to feel cosseted and cared for in the heart of Old Havana’s bustle. *Price on request; 0053-5515 1525, lomadelangel.com →*



Clockwise from top left: Scenes at chic Loma del Ángel; cooling blue tones in Paseo 206. Opposite: French doors open to the old town at Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski La Habana





LA RESERVA

A nine-room diamond carved out of a 1914 Neo-Classical mansion by a motley crew of Cuban and expat architects, La Reserva was a monster of a renovation. The team put in 21st-century plumbing and bathrooms, and designed a *pied-à-terre* inspired by recycled materials: doors became bedheads, an old oil lamp a chandelier. The art comes partly from a private collection of one of the owners, and includes works by the likes of Juan Roberto Diago Durruthy, one of the bright lights of the country's contemporary art scene. Sitting in Vedado amid its romantic parks, the hotel's garden is its *pièce de résistance* with private nooks and crannies; it's a modern-day Wi-Fi-enabled urban-garden oasis with an al fresco kitchen-bar that's great for fresh, improvised seasonal snacks available 24/7 and prepared by the young chef. The concierges can help plan day or night excursions with specialised guides to discover the city's rich music, arts and food scenes. The hotel can also be booked as an exclusive-use rental for a multi-generational holiday or milestone jaunt.

Doubles from AED 660; 0053-7833 5244, lareservavedado.com

GRAN HOTEL MANZANA KEMPINSKI LA HABANA

In a town replete with iconic grand dames, Kempinski's launch last year made waves as the country's first "proper" five-star hotel to open since the Revolution. Within spitting distance of the Neo-Baroque Gran Teatro de la Habana, the 246-key property has a buzzy rooftop pool with incredible streetscape views; the 1,000sqm European-style Spa Albear by Resense boasts a floor-to-ceiling panorama over Old Havana. Rooms are vast, ranging from 38sqm to 150sqm, with soaring ceilings and French windows. South African husband-and-wife design duo Arno and Vanessa Joubert have deftly mixed modern tastes and technologies with the classic context. Crystal chandeliers and metal screens, bevelled mirrors and gold and silver flashes hint at a Miami-inspired Cubania. The palette is chalky grey with bougainvillea pops of cerise and purple, and Claudia Corrales' black-and-white prints of architectural details hint at the richness beyond. There are six bars and restaurants, including a tobacco lounge with its own sommelier, and downstairs the revived shopping mall – a 1917 Neo-Classical port of call for the pre-Revolutionary elite – sparkles with the likes of L'Occitane, Versace and Montblanc – an allusion, perhaps, to the distant days of capitalist excess.

Doubles from AED 1,615; 0053-7869 9100, kempinski.com/havana

The writer booked her hotels with the help of cubaprivatetravel.com

HAVANA HOTELS



From top: La Reserva's laid-back kitchen-bar and one of its guest rooms. Opposite: Malecón 663 looks out to the water

