

TRAVEL

Ultimate hotel guide: where to stay in Havana

The Cuban capital is awash with stylish hotels, from cool mid-century apartments and grand art deco mansions to chic townhouses and newly renovated casas particulares.

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Loma de Ángel.

Cubans are raising their daiquiris in two year-long celebrations: Havana turning half a millennium old and the 60 years that have passed since the Cuban Revolution. The anniversaries have encouraged a surge of investment into hotel upgrades and new properties, as well as sprucing up the city sights and spawning

a slew of sleek, renovated *casas particulares* (private homes). Prices are steadily rising, but so is the quality. Old Havana is still the salsa-rich heart of the city, while the enclave of embassies in Miramar has been adopted by luxury hotels. If you want to shimmy with Havana's cool kids, choose Vedado — home to the art gallery/bar Fábrica. Time spent sleeping in Havana is time wasted they say, but these latest finds may well change that.

For a touch of class

Loma del Ángel

Named after the neighbourhood it's situated in, right in the heart of Habana Vieja, this meticulously restored home offers just two suites fit for a president — the Living Room and the Terrace. Filled with hand-picked furniture and fine linens, both are named to help you choose which space you'd prefer: a larger sitting room or a spacious balcony on which to breakfast al fresco. They charge full whack, but rain showers, butler service and personalised one-on-one tours quickly give you bang for your buck.

For hipsters

Plaza Vieja 1912

Open for just over a year, the owner's son — who works for Givenchy — designed this high-end two-bed apartment. The 'Colonial' room features a huge wood-frame bed, oil paintings and stained-glass windows with wonderful views of one of Havana's iconic central squares. There's a rooftop terrace with a sunlounger and breakfast is prepared in your private kitchen.

For stunning views

Penthouse Ydalgo

This 1950s penthouse is brimming with of-the-period *objets d'art* and a spectacular collection of artworks by contemporary Cuban artists. It has three individually designed en-suite rooms, but the standout is the suite with a roll-top bath and multiple terraces. The owners can also arrange massages, dinner, salsa classes, a local translator — you name it.



Esquina suite, Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski.

Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski

Kempinski chose to make its debut in the Caribbean with a splash. While its five-star 246 rooms, 50 suites and spa are the finest in the city, it's the El Surtidor infinity rooftop pool that's the real draw. Seated at the old town crossroads, Gran Hotel Manzana is alive with history: guests sip daiquiris in the shallows where Cuba's first silent film was once screened, and preserved in the basement are remnants of Havana's 17th-century defensive walls.

For history buffs

Hotel Nacional

This beloved 1930s art deco classic is a national monument and symbol of Cuban identity and little has changed since its heyday. The walls are lined with memorabilia and the rooms are severely kitsch — you'd laugh at the prices they charge if it were anywhere else. But you're paying to stroll the same hallowed halls as Fred Astaire once did and sleep in the same bed as Rita Hayworth or Ava Gardner — rooms 246 and 225, if you're interested.

Step back in time by attending the nightly 9pm Parisian-style cabaret for a taste of the Havana of old.

For art fiends

Havana Mar

Esteemed Cuban abstract artist, Michel Perez Pollo, owns this beautifully curated private top-floor apartment with one double bedroom. Often known simply as 'El Pollo' (The Chicken), he has held major exhibitions all around the world. His wife Johanna receives guests and arrives at a time of your choosing to prepare breakfast.

For peace and quiet

Gardens Apartment

This chic townhouse offers four minimalist rooms with mammoth four-poster beds decked out in organic linens, raw-wood doors and antique-tile floors that open onto a palm-filled central courtyard, gently wafted by fans on hot days. There's currently no wi-fi and the rooftop hasn't been developed yet, but there are promising plans for a small pool. Nice details include vintage Hemingway-esque typewriters and a well-stocked honesty bar.



Economia 156.

Economia 156

This LGBTQ+-friendly option is owned by Jazz and Stephen, a pair of film and theatre directors who are currently turning the downstairs area into a teaching theatre. It's a great entry-point to Havana's creative side — the concierge is an actor called Triana and the staff members take real interest in introducing guests to the best of Havana's nightlife and theatre scenes. There are three en suite timber-beamed rooms (two doubles, one twin) arranged around a central courtyard and guests have a high-spec kitchen at their disposal. This place is a real off-the-beaten-path find.

For 1950s movie stars

Twin Apartments

New to the renting scene, this pair of apartments on the sixth floor transports you back to the 1950s the minute you step in the lift. The interiors are a calming oasis of whimsical cotton-candy pink walls, vintage lamps, fans and newspapers in the open-plan kitchen. And the cushion-festooned sofas are

perfect for reclining on in fluffy slippers while nibbling pink-Champagne bonbons. There's pay-for wi-fi too.

For foodies

Iberostar Gran Packard

The hotel that once welcomed the likes of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and actor Marlon Brando has been resurrected from little more than a crumbling facade and reimagined with a modern extension floating atop the original colonial design. Its 321 rooms are blank-white canvases with pops of canary yellow or eggshell blue, but it's the corner infinity pool with views of the Malecón and its four restaurants that draw guests.

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