

## Trinidad, Cuba: a Photo Tour of the Old Town

By David Barker  
Photos by David Barker

The historic core of Trinidad, Cuba, is by far the most beautiful urban landscape I have ever seen in the Caribbean.

The town was founded in 1514 by the Spanish Conquistador Diego Velázquez, and is Cuba's third oldest settlement. Located on the south coast in the province of Sancti Spiritus it has a municipal population of around 75,000. The historical and cultural significance of the town was recognized in 1988, when it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site together with the nearby Valle de los Ingenios (Valley of the Sugar Mills). Until the mid-19th century, the town

was an important commercial centre for the slave-based sugar industry and it also had a lucrative sideline in smuggling. Today tourism is the mainstay of local economy, the centre-piece of which is the urban cultural attractions of the Old Town, a mixture of beautifully preserved and restored colonial architecture. Many of the pastel-coloured houses have interesting façades with large wooden doors and wrought-iron railings. Buildings are threaded together by cobblestone streets to form quietly picturesque streetscapes and occasional colonnades. Clay terracotta roof tiles provide contrasting splashes of red, vermilion, orange and brown. Imagine these colours set against a blue sky in bright sunlight; the

guide books proclaim that the town is one of Cuba's most photographed locations and it is easy to appreciate why.

The main focal point of the Old Town is the delightfully landscaped Playa Major. On the highest side of the square is Cuba's largest church, Iglesia Parroquial de la Santísima Trinidad (Church of the Holy Trinity). The cathedral has five aisles and several hand-carved ornate gothic altars in addition to the revered main altar. The Old Town contains many treasures including some world class small museums housed in the former mansions of wealthy merchants and slave owners. On our walking tour, we visited the Museo Romántico, also known as Palacio



Left: Rooftop view from the Museo Romántico showing the Museo Nacional de la Lucha Contra Bandidos (the Museum for the struggle against Counter-Revolutionaries). The building was formerly the convent of San Francisco de Asis, built in 1730

Above: Street scenes



The tranquil fishing village of Casilda located a few kilometres from Trinidad, Casilda is the port of entry for Cruise ship passengers.



The Playa Major with its landscaped gardens



Some of the items on display at the Museo Romántico



Brunet because it was once the family home of the sugar and cattle baron Conde de Brunet. Its ground floor was built in 1830 and an upper floor was added 70 years later. The museum contains a truly fabulous collection of beautifully preserved decorative period furniture such as an Austro-Hungarian writing desk, Sevres porcelain from France, Bohemian crystal-ware, Venetian glass, Dresden china, paintings, frescos and other delights acquired from Europe's finest craftsmen of the day. Other notable features include a one-ton Italian marble bath and a fully equipped, tiled kitchen with copper utensils and a clever contraption to filter water. And, situated in the middle of a largely empty room, is a lonely hand-carved boxed commode (to hide the slave master's chimney).

Like all Cuban towns, urban attractions include numerous bars and restaurants with live music and dance. We visited Palenque de los Congos Reales, a bar and restaurant which specializes in performances of Afro-

Cuban music and dance in which visitors are encouraged to participate. Its courtyard is shaded by a hugely impressive grape-vine. Nearby is the Casa de la Música, a lively night spot with a display of old musical instruments and a wide selection of Cuban music on sale. The final stop on our waking tour was La Canchanchara, a tavern and restaurant, again with live music. It has its own eponymous house cocktail made from rum (originally aguardiente), honey, lime and sparkling water, served in simple but tasteful earthenware cups. **cx**

Sources: various, including field notes and *Insight Guides: Cuba* (2011).



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