

Havana: A city to fall in love with

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By María Josefina Arce

A city that enamors, amazes and traps in its mystery, history, cultural and architectural richness, bustle and daily life, that is Havana, where past, present and future converge.

Close to celebrating its 502nd anniversary this November 16, the capital of Cuba, with its bewitching Malecon, awakens multiple sensations. Such is its magic that the famous Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca said about his visit in 1929: "When I found myself in front of the Morro, I felt such a great emotion and joy that I threw my gloves and raincoat to the ground".

For others like the Mexican-born but Cuban-hearted poet Fayad Jamís, if Havana did not exist he would invent it, and for the Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar it was the only city that was truly his.

Over the years, its streets, squares, parks, theaters and emblematic places have witnessed the passage of relevant figures of universal culture such as Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Prize in Literature 1945, Venezuelan novelist Romulo Gallegos and American writer Ernest Hemingway, who made this city his place of creation.

Closer in time we have the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature, and the Uruguayan Mario Benedetti, who also lived among us and was a jury member of the prestigious Casa de las Américas Prize.

Immortalized by many in their writings and songs, Havana also treasures a rich history of struggle and resistance since that distant 18th century, when tobacco growers led the uprisings of the *vegueros* against the Spanish Metropolis between 1717 and 1723; or the determined resistance of Havana Creoles to the seizure of the former village of San Cristobal by the English troops in 1762.

Countless are the spaces where the capital city was forged. The prestigious University of Havana (in the photo), the stairway and the surrounding streets witnessed the fervor and revolutionary thinking of young people. Julio Antonio Mella, José Antonio Echeverría and the historic leader of the Revolution, Fidel Castro (1926-2016), among others, passed through its classrooms.

And today Havana, without forgetting its past and its history, is carving its present and future. It renews itself, it is the object of multiple transforming actions. Its inhabitants work so that it continues to be a Wonder City, a title it officially received in 2016.

That is, the city chosen in 2019 by the prestigious National Geographic magazine as one of the recommended tourist destinations for that year.

Havana does not stop its march and today, after almost two years of pandemic, it is once again open to foreign visitors, while not neglecting epidemiological surveillance in the face of COVID-19, which, although controlled, is still a worldwide threat.

The majestic and special Havana, that city of my childhood, youth and old age, is alive. And while it awaits with joy and enthusiasm the 502nd anniversary of its founding, it is already looking forward to those to come.

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