



CUBA - A Jewish Mission Itinerary

This itinerary is intended to give you an idea of what is involved in the Jewish program part of a mission. The itineraries for these missions change to reflect the needs of the Jewish communities in Cuba. Some items change or are deleted while other items are added but the mission purpose of bringing support to the Jewish communities of Cuba remains unaltered.

This full-time mission to bring support to the Jewish communities also allows time to experience the sights, history, culture, art, music and people of this extraordinary country.

Day 1 – Thursday, November 8

We fly to Havana directly from JFK. On arrival in Havana, we proceed to the neighborhood of Vedado. The neighborhood is all about the spirit of Havana's people and provides a firsthand look at the promise of the future. Children play kickball on an elevated pedestrian oasis in the middle of wide avenues while classic American cars cruise by. Parents return home from work as students close their books and unwind with friends along the Malecón. No trip to Vedado is complete without a stop at Coppelia for some of its famous ice cream. Here, you'll sway to the melodies of life and groove to the music at clubs frequented by the likes of Ernest Hemingway. Our hotel, the **Melia Cohiba located in Vedado** is fully air conditioned with stunning views of the city and the sea. The hotel provides comfort and an elegant, modern design with Cuban marble and references to the world of cigars and the famous Cohiba brand. The hotel features an outdoor pool, several restaurants, a night club and a boutique gallery. En route to the hotel, you will see a city that has remained just as it looked more than fifty years ago.

Upon arrival, we have lunch and check into our hotel. Late this afternoon, we go to LaCabana fortress to view Havana from across the bay and **Morro Castle**. In Spanish "morro" means a rock which is very visible from the sea and therefore serves as a navigational landmark. Perched on the promontory on the opposite side of the harbor from Old Havana, it can be viewed from miles around as it dominates the port entrance. Built initially in 1589 in response to raids on Havana harbor, el Morro protected the mouth of the harbor with a chain being strung across the water to the fort at La Punta.

Our first day concludes with a welcome dinner together.

DAY 2 – Friday, November 9

Breakfast is served daily. In order to understand the scope of the Jewish life in Cuba, we begin our mission at the ships' terminal starting with a **walking tour of Old Havana and the Jewish Quarter**. Old Havana has been declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO and will remind you of cities in Europe with its beautiful architectural elements. During the walking tour of the four main squares Plaza de Armas, Plaza de San Francisco, Plaza Vieja and Plaza de la Catedral; you will gain insight about the families that forged the Jewish Community of Cuba and the present members of that community.

We go to view Cuban art collection at the **National Museum of Fine Arts of Havana**. Founded on February 13, 1913 and having made frequent moves it was finally placed on the block once occupied by the old Colon Market. In 1954, the new Palacio de Bellas Artes was

opened, designed by the architect Rodriguez Pichardo. The museum is dedicated exclusively to housing Cuba Art collections. Spanning the 17th and 19th centuries has rooms dedicated to landscape, religious subjects and the Costumbrismo narrative scenes of Cuban life. A modernist sculpture by noted Cuban artist Rita Lonja stands outside the main entrance.

This afternoon we go to **Beth Shalom Temple**. Built in 1952, the synagogue is located in the Vedado district of Havana that was once a center of Jewish activity. Much of the original building was sold, and only part remains in Jewish hands today. Extensive repairs were undertaken in the 1990s with help from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Jewish donors from Miami. The building actually looks brand new. Today it contains the main community center and library with a nursery and educational activities to help bring back the youth into the Jewish community. We will meet with **Adela Dworin, president of Beth Shalom and other community leaders** to discuss and assess the needs of the Jewish community in the island. We participate in the **evening services at Beth Shalom** followed by interaction with congregation members at the Oneg Shabbat.

Back at our hotel we have a festive **Shabbat dinner**

DAY 3 – Saturday, November 10; Shabbat

We will have a **briefing on Cuba’s religious life, economy and related topics by a professor of the University**.

Following the briefing, we go to **Revolution Square** and learn about Jose Marti, Cuba’s National Hero and his relationship with the American Jewish Community.

Next, we stop at a **local market**. With help from your escort and guide, it’s a great chance to interact with the vendors and get a feel for real life. Here you may purchase fruits, vegetables and flowers to be given to a food bank.

In the afternoon, free time around **Central Park and rides in old classic American cars**.

We continue to the **Hotel Nacional**. The hotel is a historic luxury hotel located on the Malecón in the middle of Vedado, Havana, Cuba. It stands on Taganana hill a few metres from the sea, and offers a view of Havana Harbour, the seawall and the city. It stands out due to its refined elegance and its ancient splendor, which since 1930 has attracted a large number of illustrious guests including artists, actors, athletes, writers, diplomats, scientists and politicians. In December 1946 it even hosted an infamous mob summit which Francis Ford Coppola memorably dramatized in his film *The Godfather Part II*. Despite its restoration during the 1990s, the hotel no longer carries the status and impact it once did, but its remaining splendor and history serves as a tangible link to Cuba’s past.

This evening dinner is at one of the private home restaurants called a paladar, a relatively recent alternative to state-run restaurants.

DAY 4 – Sunday, November 11

We go to **Hemingway’s House**. In 1940 Hemingway, with his new wife Martha, purchased a home outside Havana, Cuba. He would live there for the next twenty years. The Hemingways named the site Finca Vigia, or “lookout farm”. Hemingway became a fixture of Havana, and stayed in the country longer than many Americans chose to after relations between Cuba and the United States began to deteriorate. He fished extensively aboard his boat, Pilar, and enjoyed the

island lifestyle, hanging out in Havana, and entertaining guests at the Finca. His home, with many original furnishings, hunting trophies, and personal artifacts can be viewed.

Afterwards we visit a **typical Cuban home** located near Guanabacoa and share fellowship with the residents.

Then we visit the **Jewish Sunday school** where we participate in classroom teaching at various levels and distribute Jewish text to the students.

Next we go to the neighborhood of **Guanabacoa to do work at the Jewish cemetery**. We will clean up graves and help to restore graves in the children's section. Those who are unable to do physical work may recite Kaddish at graves. A stop will be made at the first and **oldest Holocaust Memorial in the Western Hemisphere** located inside the cemetery.

This evening we will enjoy a **cultural performance** and dinner at a paladar.

DAY 5 – Monday, November 12

We visit with **José Rodriquez Fuster**. Born in August 1946, Fuster is a Cuban naïve artist specializing in ceramics, painting, drawing, engraving, and graphic design. This winner of many awards with collections in prominent museums has made a major contribution over 10 years of rebuilding and decorating the fishing town of Jaimanitas in the outskirts of Havana, where he lives. Jaimanitas is now a unique work of public art where Fuster has decorated over 80 houses with ornate murals and domes to suit the personality of his neighbors. Nowadays, Fuster's art is a cherished part of Cuban culture. He sponsors this project by the sale of his paintings and ceramics.

Las Terrazas is a small community and nature reserve in the municipality of Candelaria, Artemisa Province, Cuba. It is located in the Sierra del Rosario mountains (part of Guaniguanico range), which was designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1984. The pioneering ecovillage of Las Terrazas dates back to a reforestation project in 1968. Today it's a burgeoning activity center and the site of the earliest coffee plantations in Cuba. Arriving in Las Terrazas is like penetrating the intensity of exquisite wild places where humans and nature become one. This is the impression that the evergreen forests, rivers and crystal clear waterfalls give. Entering the community is to have the certainty that such beautiful sites really exist and that human efforts to protect such natural environment will persist.

Dinner is at a paladar.

DAY 6 – Tuesday, November 13

In 1908, the first Sephardic immigrants arrived in Cuba, mostly from Turkey, and to a lesser degree, from Syria and Greece. In 1914, the first Sephardic synagogue was founded. Its name was Shevet Achim Hebrew Union. It functioned until 1995, when it became necessary to close its doors due to its state of disrepair. Successive waves of immigration took place around the First and Second World Wars. At the time this happened, there were in existence in the capital of Cuba two Sephardic synagogues. One of them, founded in 1954, the Sephardic Hebrew Center of Cuba, is still functioning presently. It is the only Sephardic synagogue in Havana City. Presently, approximately 65% of the total Jewish population of the country is Sephardic. We will go to the **Sephardic Hebrew Center and meet with Dr. Myra Levy**, president of the congregation followed by fellowship and interaction with members of the community.

Those guests returning to New York will have a transfer to the airport and the group taking the extension option continues to Mantanzas.

DAY 6 – Tuesday, November 13 – Extension

We depart Havana and stop at the Bacunayagua Bridge, The highest bridge in Cuba with spectacular views of the countryside.

We continue to **Matanzas** city. During the 18th and 19th centuries the city developed a gigantic literary and musical heritage, and was regularly touted as the ‘Athens of Cuba.’ Two pivotal Cuban musical forms, danzón and rumba, were hatched here. Despite the colonial aura, the cultural riches haven’t disappeared. We have a **city tour** and learn about its past Jewish life. A stop will be made at Ediciones Vigia to learn how books were bound by hand.

We continue to Varadero and check in at the **Melia Las Americas** for lunch and dinner. Rest of the day is at leisure to relax at the resort. Melia Las Americas offers the tranquility of a hotel environment designed for adults. Its atmosphere exudes the sensuality of this beautiful island and a fascination that will last forever. This five star all-inclusive holiday resort located right on the beach offers a quiet atmosphere, refined and elegant tropical design and stunning views of the sea. The resort features 4 freshwater pools, 2 with hydro-massage, hair and beauty salon, fitness center and water sports. The Melia Las Americas offers varied and delicious culinary offerings at its 6 restaurants where you can enjoy dinners, off the menu items and live music in some restaurants.

DAY 7- Wednesday, November 14

Morning is at leisure at the resort with check-out after lunch. We stop in Matanzas for a **community project** and return to Havana and the Hotel Melia Cohiba by early evening.

DAY 8 – Thursday, November 15

Check out of the hotel and continue to a **cigar factory** to see how cigars are rolled and visit the **Compas Dance Company**. The group uses percussion, African rhythms, flamenco and classical ballet creating a new and different Cuban beat.

We continue to the airport for our return flight to New York.