





A WINDOW INTO CUBA THROUGH HAVANA CABANA, KEY WEST

By Maritza Cosano, *Travel & Features Writer*

No matter where you go in Key West, everyone can agree the island's awe-inspiring architecture is stunningly beautiful. Whether you're traveling solo or planning a family vacation and want to explore the island's authentic character, the place to stay to take it all in is **Havana Cabana Resort**.

This waterfront gem was voted the third best hotel in Florida in Travel + Leisure 2019 World's Best Awards and Top 10 Florida Keys Resorts. Centrally located on US1, the 106-room upper-middle-range resort is only a ten-minute car ride from famed Duval Street and 90 miles from Cuba, the island nation that inspired this tropical locale—my first home.

The resort's unmistakable palettes of cobalt blue, banana yellow, and sun-bleached pinks is an oasis where tourists from around the world flock to taste a bit of Havana, Cuba. And none have been disappointed yet.

From the second you enter the two-story building through its wooden and iron doors, you get the picture. Cuba was always a place to relax. Even American writer Ernest Hemingway, who lived both in Cuba and Key West, knew that.

As you stroll through the lobby, you are greeted by a bevy of bright colors—a tropical Cuban style home inspiration!

The hotel's polished, art-deco granite floors with soft bronze inlays fit right into an island that still teems with finned Cadillac and Chevrolet classics—like the one parked outside Havana Cabana, a restored original ready for guests to take a ride around the island.

Tucked into a corner, there is a mini “quincalla,” as it is called in Cuba, a small retail store where a variety of usually inexpensive articles can be found. Things like hats, T-shirts, bags, lotions, beach towels, and sodas bottled in glass—a remnant of a bygone era.

On either side of the lobby are twin black iron stairways leading to the second level, with walls painted by Daniel Fila, an artist from Miami with an impressive studio. The paintings add more urban beauty and grittiness to the picturesque landmark, and the scenes are reminiscent of Old Havana in its heyday. A tall, dark-haired, so good-looking Cuban man doing sort of a rooster routine dance around an exotic Cuban chic,

whose curvy figure has often been compared to a guitar that delights with its melodies.

The nostalgic scene is not missed by Fila's brush: the texture of her long brown hair, the fullness of her red lips and pronounced curves, here painted in vivid but matted hues to exude a class of her own—a delicious culture mixture of natural beauty, self-assuredness, and sensuality.

As you walk past these murals, it forever symbolizes the face and attitude of Cuban men and women in Havana, circa 1950s when the world made it its playground and pleasure garden. It's very comfortable. It's very chic. And, for a moment you feel like you're back in those times—which my father tells me they were good! *“Cuando Cuba era Cuba.”*

Inside the comfortable private quarters, you will find modern furnishings beautifully adorned with island décor. That same Cuban flair is carried to the outside spaces like the dominoes painted walkways by artist Lance Berry, who also created the dramatic sea life murals throughout the hotel's open spaces.

Art is everywhere here and that's because Cuban culture has had a tremendous influence on global culture relative to the size of the island—from its music, art, dance, and literary masterpieces.

Cuando Cuba era Cuba. A scene from Cuba's heyday, painted by Daniel Fila.
Photo by Alexandra Gomez









Views of the dramatic underwater vistas and coral reefs guests can enjoy aboard Key West Glass Bottom Boat. Photo courtesy of Fury Water Adventures Key West

Fort Lauderdale artist, Colette RueLette's mermaid, and floor murals bring out natural scenes that bring the ocean in. But no other feature will delight the senses more than Havana Cabana's tropical-style oversized pool, the largest on the island. Look to the right and there you'll find the best Mojito tiki-bar in Key West, serving 25 crafted Cuban-inspired Mojitos. This is complemented by the Floridita Food Truck style restaurant that's set in a backyard with plenty of tables and chairs around it. Here guests can try their award-winning Cuban sandwich and authentic dishes celebrating the islands' Cuban-Conch heritage.

Havana Cabana has been designed to accommodate one guest or more: families, couples, and their furry friends! With an unusual array of entertaining spots, if you feel like playing a round of ping pong while you wait for your **Cuban ham croquetas** or **guava and cheese pastelitos**, friendly staff will serve you while you play.

Feel like taking a ride to Duval Street or any other hot spot? The hotel sports bicycles and vintage Vespas are available for guests to rent and explore the island.

Havana Cabana has been dazzling its guests since opening day in April 2018. Who would have guessed that just a year after this resort would become so popular? While the guestrooms put a fresh spin on Cuban island living, the exteriors draw you in. It is a good alliance of antiquity and modernity set in one of the U.S.'s most famous islands.

For those who have never traveled to our southernmost point, Key West is a must-visit destination for vacationing with something to offer to everyone—**food, shopping, culture, history, and nature**. One of them is set to spark your wanderlust. It sure sparked mine years ago, and every time I go it's like the first time!

This time, I started my tour of the island riding in Havana Cabana's Old Chevy, a 1957 beauty standing watch outside the hotel's entrance that turned heads everywhere we went.

And how could I not visit my favorite writer's home? Call it serendipity, but Ernest Hemingway's House inspires me. Opened seven days a week, the property showcases the art and genius of this of this American literary giant along with his wife Pauline's home décor and their six-toed cat's pedigree. Today, 67 cats are residing in Hemingway's house, now a museum, just like his home in Cuba—a relic of a place containing unpublished manuscripts, letters, and many other things writers, readers, and historians would appreciate.

Just when I thought the Key West buzz had reached a fever pitch, an ocean adventure beckoned and a Glass Bottom Boat tour made it much more thrilling. I took on the experience of this 90-minute exploration, a window to Key West's sea. The Glass Bottom Boat offers a seated sun deck and air-conditioned, enclosed viewing area, restrooms, and a snack bar and it is an awesome attraction to explore the dramatic underwater vistas generally reserved for scuba divers and to see one of the most biologically diverse marine eco-systems in the world. Sincerely, one of the things you do just once in a lifetime.

Key West has the most memorable things to do, the best places to eat, and without a doubt, one of the best vacations you will ever have. At the center of all the fun, Havana Cabana is a reliable place you can call home for a few days—or weeks!

Mojitos, old American cars, guitar serenades, Cuban pastries...a celebration of the cultural charm of the island neighbor. And here, if you walk a little slower, sleep a little later, and try new things. In Key West you will find your window into Cuba.

Now is the time to go before the secret's out.

If you visit, Havana Cabana At Key West is located on 3420 N Roosevelt Blvd, Key West, FL 33040. On the web: havanacabanakeywesthotel.com