

Havana Mañana: A Guide to  
Cuba and the Cubans, by  
Consuelo Herwer and Marjorie  
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■■■ CHAPTER II ■■■

Three Bags Full

TURISTA is the Cuban epithet of derision for everything gauche or socially incorrect. "Turista!" uttered with a what-else-can-you-expect shrug of the shoulders, is the Cuban's answer to all *faux pas* committed by visitors. Nothing stamps one as a *tourista* more irrevocably than the wrong clothes. There isn't a more forlorn spectacle than a boatload of tourists descending upon the Prado in January, decked out in the white linens, the Panama hats and all the Southern trappings foisted upon their unsuspecting persons by the resort departments of home-town shops. They are considerably baffled (that's understatement!) to find the Cubans conservatively going about in dark street clothes, business suits, suede shoes, felt hats—just the clothes the tourists left behind. Unpredictable as their own weather, Cubans are creatures of habit about dress.

No matter how the mercury soars, from December through March (Cuban winter), dark clothes are worn. True, these are of tropical worsted or gabardine for men, and thin silk or rayon crepe for women; nevertheless, designs and colors are the same as fashions worn on Fifth Avenue during similar months.

Obviously, all of us choose the vacation clothes that look best and do most for us. Be sure, however, to figure out a wardrobe that is not at complete odds with the Cuban scene. Besides looking better, there's a perfectly practical reason for blending with your Havana environment. Looking as though you belonged helps you to escape the plague of street peddlers and beggars that descends upon *touristas*. It is really a form of protective coloring.

*Warning to the let-yourself-go school of thought:* Don't even dare to think of wearing slacks, short socks or backless sun dresses on the city streets, if you're a woman; cork helmets or two-piece play ensembles, if you're a man. You'd never dream of walking down Broadway in such a get-up, would you? Remember that Havana is as large a city as San Francisco, and certainly as cosmopolitan. To dress as you would for the streets at home is your safest bet.

The Cuban summer begins April 1st, and overnight everyone changes into light colors. Now the men appear in magnificent hundred-twist linen drill suits, laundered and starched to the high perfection of fine damask tablecloths, while the wom-

en wear the same kind of warm-weather frocks seen on our city streets during the dog days. Again, your cue is to dress as you would for summer at home.

It is in the beach- and play-clothes department, however, that you really can go to town! As long as you wear them at the right time and place—for active sports, on beaches, at private clubs—your play clothes can rival Joseph's coat. Women can play siren-on-the-sands and men disport themselves in the vivid trunks they have been too shy to wear before. Cubans adore novelties for sports, and a pair of rocking-chair heel sandals, fresh from Bonwit's, made one of us the sensation at the yacht club!

You're not going to wear evening clothes as much as you think you are; so go light on quantity. Cubans usually dress formally for public appearances only on Thursday and Saturday nights, or when something special is scheduled. Otherwise, evening kit is confined to private parties and club galas except during the Christmas holiday season. Then everything is particularly festive, and to dress is the rule rather than the exception.

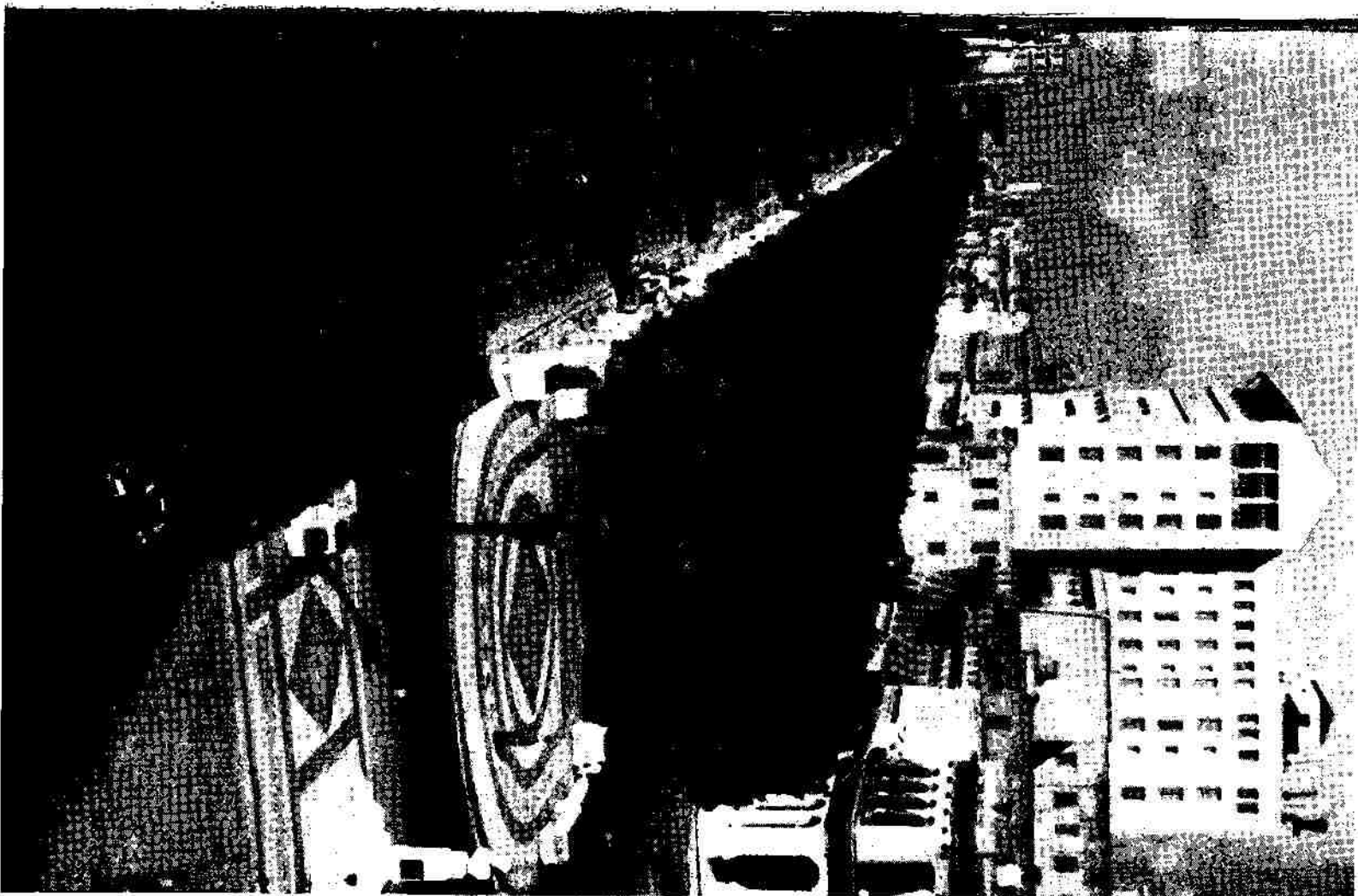
**FOR MEN ONLY:** Many travelers fondly imagine casual clothes are all Havana requires. Nothing could be further from the truth. Native men are as clothes-conscious as their women, and the well-to-do take great pains with their wardrobes, achieving the results associated with elegant Continentals. Men of means naturally order their suits tailored to

measure in the strictest European tradition, and their understanding of fabrics and needling gives them an almost feminine interest in dressing. Besides, everywhere one turns there are the military men; the army, the navy, the police, even the private night-watchmen, are in stunning uniforms, colorful as any from a musical comedy, fitting with whittled-down perfection. Really, they steal the show.

There is great adoration of American clothes, primarily because our mass-manufacturing methods supply such good-looking, well-fitting suits, ready-made. Also, our easy cut and fit do more to flatter the average male physique.

Cubans in lower-income brackets often indulge in extreme tailoring, trousers that fit too tightly, sporty-plus jackets, elaborate shoes with pointed toes. Your gentleman of income, however, is conservatively correct and wears boots in the best British manner, glossy and deeply polished. Almost all men have their shoes made to order, since prices for custom-made shoes are much lower than ours. Twelve dollars buys the finest leather and best workmanship.

Color is exciting to Cubans of every class. If they err in taste, it will be by wearing florid shades or combining too many. The Parisian love of detail and intricate fabrics is also quite Cuban, and the most common fashion blind-spot is in the failure to ensemble properly. Even the well-dressed Cuban sometimes gets himself together like a swing-band,



each item of his apparel being chosen for its ability to hit a note and carry it. Evidently to his eye the individual merit of a shirt or tie is more important than its effect on the whole.

THE SUITS AN AMERICAN TAKES TO CUBA should be similar to those he'd wear at home, though lighter in weight. From December through March, tropical worsteds, gabardines, flannel slacks and tweed jackets in dark colors are best, accompanied by a light top-coat, of course, and a felt hat.

You will definitely need a hat for Havana; so don't be rash enough to run the risk of sun-stroke, notwithstanding shaded sidewalks. Incidentally, here, for once, are men whose hats are above reproach. Cubans not only have the knack of picking a good-looking felt, but one that actually flatters the face under it. And the well-dressed Cuban has many more hats than his American brother.

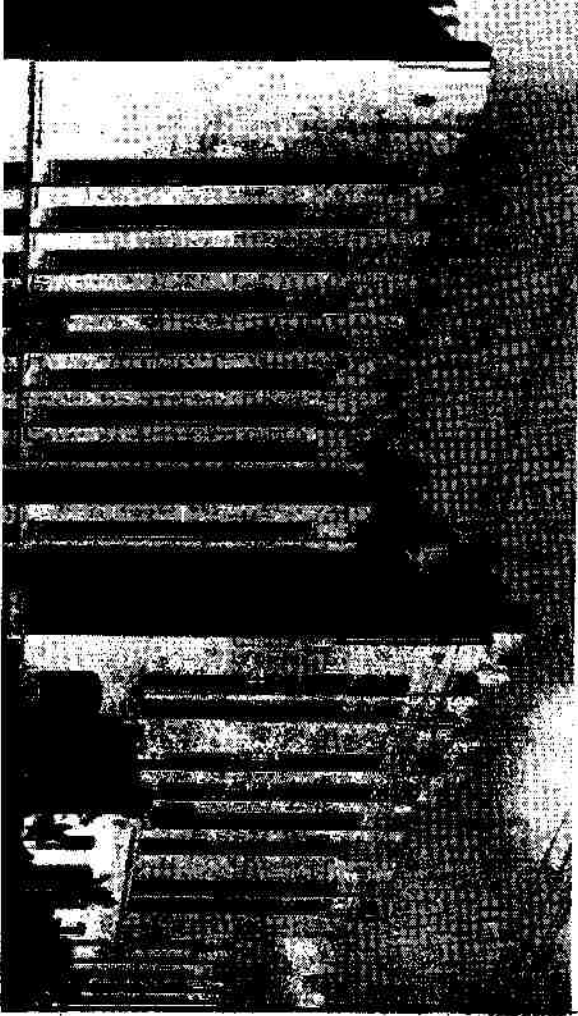
Be sure you have plenty of shirts, socks, underclothes and handkerchiefs; you will want to change more often than you do at home. If you have a yen for color, by all means, let yourself go in your ties. "The brighter, the better" is the Cuban's motto, and, currently, those big patterns are considered quite the thing.

*Reiteration:* We can't sufficiently deplore the bad taste shown by so many Americans who loom across hotel lobbies in messy, unpressed lounge suits, notable for un-chic. If you insist on disregarding our suggestion about sticking to fairly cuffed clothes in the large metropolis of Havana, we urge



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that your play clothes be unobtrusive in color and classic in style. For Heaven's sake, find a fabric blessed with enough stamina to hold its shape and not go baggy. When you wear such an outfit into a restaurant or hotel, slip on a jacket.

For evening, when dressing is in order, black dinner suits of tropical worsted are fine. Light jackets are a mistake during the winter season. Remember, however, that Cubans don't wear evening clothes in public as much as we do, and there isn't a night club doing business in Havana that will refuse admission to a cash customer because he's in street clothes.

When the summer season starts, everyone goes into whites, topped off with Panama hats, and March 31st sees Cuban business men carefully carrying home important-looking paper packages—their new straw hats. From April on, bring with you the best-looking linen and light-colored tropical-weight suits you can find. As we mentioned before, the Cubans are supreme in whites. They often have as many as six or seven white linen suits, change them after one wearing and look immaculate and fresh. For evening you can sport the same gray, white or beige jackets they affect, worn with cummerbunds.

When you pack your bathing suit, remember that *La Playa* (public beach) and some of the more conservative clubs require that men wear tops. And take along a sweat-shirt or robe as protection from too much sun.

WOMEN'S AND MISSES' DEPARTMENT: In Havana, the fashion tendency is all toward formality. No Cuban woman just puts on a dress and goes out. When she appears one is conscious of a toilette that makes an effect. She is preceded and followed by an almost tangible air of elegance, distinctly European in feeling. If she is wealthy, her costumes are either imported, with an abundance of intricate detail and fine hand-work, or custom-made. Because the *criolla* figure, like the Frenchwoman's, is short-limbed, her clothes must be fitted with extreme care, and to-order fashions rather than ready-made solve the problem of smarter Cubans.

If you find while you're in Havana that you want the fun of a new dress, provided time allows, you can have a knockout, made-to-order costume at much below U.S. cost. First, find your fabric. All the big stores have excellent yard-goods departments specializing in prints. If you want to snoop for bargains, there are shops along Muralla or Neptuno Streets that sell remnants of dress lengths. Now, what you need is that little dream of a dressmaker. Ask the salesgirl who sold you the silk or the counter girl or the manicurist. Somewhere along the line, you'll have success. Male or female, the dressmaker will carry out your ideas, copy a magazine sketch or design something especially for you, all very expertly and without benefit of pattern. You'll pay in the neighborhood of \$10.00 or less, all told, for a typical couturier affair, cut to measure and worked out in canvas, first. Your frock will be

