

Cuba 2020 – What do I Really Think?

Captivating Cuba was a WAI walking adventure that Sherry and I took from January 29 through Feb 10, 2020. Truth be told it was Sherry's bucket list thing – you know, all the old cars, and I just went along for support – you know, because I am a really good husband. I was also informed I would be doing a presentation for the Falcon Wanderers' Christmas potluck dinner meeting this year, so I was ready for that. I took over 1,650 photos and over 50 videos of the trip. You can find them from the gallery at our web site on <http://woodlandwanderers.org>, or directly at <http://woodlandwanderers.org/Cuba2/>. I have posted a summary page with some photos and videos and provide links to all the videos and photos I took on each day. I am in the process of building a PowerPoint presentation of the trip for the meeting.

There are, of course, some things that stand out in my mind from the trip. Being worried about traveling into a communist country and wondering if we would get back out. The food. The water. The toilet. The attitudes of the people. The weather. My knees. Turns out we did not need to worry. We were able to leave the country. The food was great. We did not drink the water out of the tap. We threw our toilet paper into the bucket, not the toilet. (Andrea told me today it is like that in Mexico as well.) The attitudes of the people were positive, but certainly related to how much money they could get out of us. The weather was good, but quite humid, even though we were told it was the dry, cold part of the year. My knees did fine – I had a shot right before we left – but I stepped off a ledge and compressed my SI joint because I was not paying attention. Sigh. The thing that stands out the most, is Sherry getting a massage on the beach of a Caribbean island by a dark and handsome Cuban man. That photo is now the background on my computer, and the video has been suppressed under threat of bodily harm!

So, to make a short story long, everything turned out great. We have good memories of the trip, with many photos to back it up. But wait, there's more.

I am not a student of history. I had heard of the Cuban Revolution, the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cuban exiles in Miami, and of Cubans using any means possible to cross the 90 miles of Atlantic Ocean between Cuba and the US. But it was never something I had actually thought about. Now that I have seen it, I know that after 60 years, socialism still does not work. Rationing, suppression of speech, lack of infrastructure maintenance, farming like a hundred years ago – you know, two oxen pulling a single blade plow. Fascinating to see firsthand, but depressing nonetheless.

Apparently the Castro regime figured out that to prevent another revolution they needed to loosen things up a bit, so they created a new economy in the early 90s, allowing some forms of capitalism to be practiced in a newly established tourist economy, complete with its own money – the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) – and financial (taxing) systems.

Now, Cuba has three economies. The socialist government, where they take 98% of production at government set prices, allow access to necessities through rationing (bodegas and ration cards), and control hotels and transportation. Because of the rationing, there is an underground black market. The Cuban Peso is worth about 1/25 of a dollar, and while you can purchase necessities at cheap, subsidized prices they are not always available. And now the tourist economy, which includes the old cars and Casa Particulares – like an AirBNB – and restaurants. They only accept CUCs for payment, and CUCs are only available in Cuba. They are monopoly money everywhere else in the world.

All in all, a great time. But food for thought. Enjoy the pictures.