

NET Shareback
May 28, 2017

"Beautiful and wild and confusing and exhausting and exciting and so very many things."
–[Meghann Wilkinson](#), Lucky Plush ensemble member

Dear traveling artist:

In January 2017, Chicago-based dance theater company, Lucky Plush Productions, traveled to Havana, Cuba for phase two of an artistic exchange with the Cuban Danza Teatro Retazos. The week-long residency culminated in a shared community performance of work from each company plus a piece created during our residency and performed by dancers from both companies. While the artistic aspects of the exchange were generative and led to important discoveries in our devising process, perhaps the most valuable bits of information we can pass along are the insights we gained about traveling to and staying in Havana – which were initially mysterious, and seem to be constantly in flux. So that others may enjoy productive artistic residencies in Cuba, we hope our shareback helps to detangle the logistical components.

Below in black is the tour packet I created for our ensemble, with my post-Cuba commentary in [blue](#). Much of the information gathered prior to our trip via internet was either incomplete or inaccurate. I hope you find this format useful, but don't hesitate to reach out to me directly with questions or clarifications.

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LUCKY PLUSH TOUR PACKET
Havana, Cuba | January 2017

PACKING LIST:

- **Passport**
- **Visa**
 - It was so *easy* to pass through customs at the Havana airport, so there was no paperwork necessary (even though I gave each company member a very detailed tour packet). All you need is purchase a **\$50 visa** at the U.S. airport from which you fly directly to Cuba, and then say hello to the customs agent. We bought \$80 visas ahead of time - don't do that as it's obviously more costly and unnecessary.
 - This applies to guests if you bring friends or family with you: Traveling to Cuba for purely tourist reasons is not approved by the US government, but how or when they would find this out, I do not know. When you return to the U.S. and customs asks you why you traveled to Cuba, explain that you were there for an educational or cultural visit.
- **Itinerary:** I will provide for LPP ensemble. *You do not need this.*
- Proof of medical insurance. *You do not need this as it is included in the cost of your airline ticket!*
- **Plenty of US currency** (you can travel there comfortably on \$50 – \$100 per day, but bring extra to be safe): American Debit/Credit cards will **NOT WORK** in Cuba. There's an official currency exchange at the airport in Havana; change some money to CUC (don't exchange to CUP). Don't change all of it at once. After that, the only place we should change money is at CADECA (Casa de Cambio). There are many locations around the city and close to the studio and it's the only official place to change money. Never change to someone on the street who is offering a better rate, most of the time is a scam. \$1 USD = 1 CUC = 24 CUP. You can exchange your leftover CUC back to US dollars (or whatever) before you leave the country at airport.

-The lines at Casa de Cambio are usually REALLY long and hours long, so plan your day accordingly. However, we found a couple banks where the lines were quite short, and those are just as "safe."

-If you use discretion, you really can spend very little on food. There are select restaurants that charge \$20/meal, but for the most part you can live on \$50/day. Even souvenirs are cheap.

-There is also a LONG line to change money at the airport (in order to pay your cab driver). I really don't know any way around this, except Megs changed with some people in the line who were returning to the states, and my cab driver stopped at a bank on the way into Havana (but he moved his car, so when I came out of the bank I thought he'd disappeared with my



suitcase and all the money in it. He had just parked in the bank's parking lot though. False alarm).

In line at the Casa de Cambio

- **Clothing and rehearsal wear**

- If you are a woman, and alone, be prepared. You will receive many comments, but don't worry, as no one would cause you harm because there is virtually no crime in Cuba!
- Wear comfortable shoes since you'll walk a lot.

FLIGHTS

- We purchased our flights on Kayak.com in Nov./Dec. 2016, some direct from NYC (\$200 round trip!), and some from Chicago with one connection in Atlanta, Ft. Lauderdale or Miami. As of 4.21.17, that's still the easiest way. Don't buy charter flights.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION

- Hopefully Retazos will meet us at airport with visas or customs has record of Retazos applying on our behalf. This absolutely did not happen. There was confusion in my communications with Retazos, and they did not meet the ensemble at the airport. Cubans are really not able to communicate well with US residents as email is used less frequently, and phone communication is also trickier.
- We will take cabs from the airport to our accommodations. Probably not the best. Instead, arrange for your Airbnb host to pick you up at the airport and the driver will meet you there holding a sign with your name on it. It's not possible to call your host once you arrive, but they will check your flight status.
- Walk, walk, walk! If your destination is more than 25 minutes away, I personally loved taking the bike taxis across town. There are also taxi cabs available, but there is no emissions testing, and it's *really* hard to breathe.
- Download an [offline map](#) to your smartphone. I downloaded the app, maps.me, and then downloaded a map of Cuba. I found this to be EXTREMELY HELPFUL! Do this.



Walking to rehearsal

ACCOMMODATIONS

- Definitely reserve via AirBnb since there are many options (and hotels are prohibitively expensive), but DO IT EARLY, especially if you are traveling during the winter months which is high tourist season. We booked way too late, so the pickings were slim.
- I suggest staying within walking distance to the location in which you'll work; it makes life much easier.
- Communications with Airbnb hosts are OK in advance of your trip, but you are never messaging/emailing with the person actually caretaking your building; for us, it was a complex network and one person passed the information to one or two more people. Go with a laid back attitude, as it will all work out as long as you've received confirmation that your Airbnb is booked.



Approaching our Airbnbs

Reservation 1

Dates: Sunday, Jan. 8 - 16, 2017

Air Bnb: Calle Cuba No.656 entre Sol y Acosta,
Habana Vieja

Address: [Calle Cuba No.656 entre Sol y Acosta,
Habana Vieja](#)

Reservation 2

Dates: Sun. Jan. 8 - Thurs. Jan. 19, 2017

AirBnb - [Casa Amelia - Plaza Vieja - Centro
Histórico](#)

Address: Teniente Rey 3er, escaler amplia e
iluminada, La Habana

Hostess (Mrs Ana)

Contact name: Peter Suarez Tuma

Phone: +53 5356 6922

Email: peter-be7ufzjt76gjmvhk@host.airbnb.com

Teniente Rey 10 apartamento 305 entre Oficinas y Mercaderes

Host, Claudia: 53 5249 0600

House: 53 779 70355

Reservation 3

Dates: Sunday, Jan. 8 - 16, 2017

AirBnb: [Apartment de Alfa in Havana Center!](#)
[Entire home/apt hosted by Caribbean Casas](#)

Address: Calle Acosta, 113, Apto 104, between streets Cuba and San Ignacio, Havana Vieja, 10100

Phone: +34 674 396 872

#4 Michel & Jordan staying with family

- You should try to spend time with Cubans. It's fun, educational, and life-changing. One of our ensemble members, Michel, is from Havana and we visited his family's home for dinner one night. His parents and brother are some of the warmest people we've ever met.



Michel's Mama



All of us at Michel's childhood home.



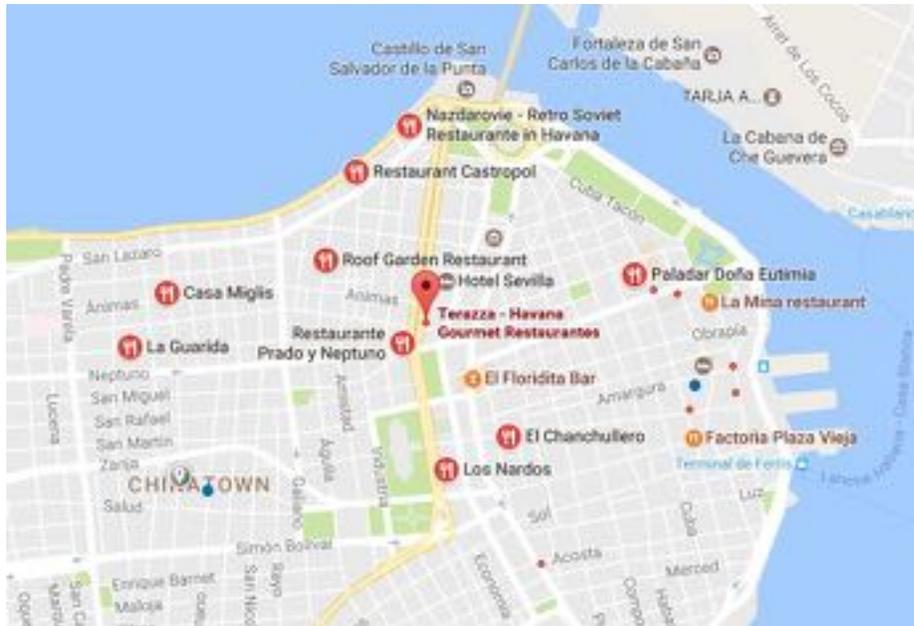
FOOD AND DRINK

- **DO NOT DRINK THE WATER.** You must only drink bottled water with a sealed cap. This includes daiquiris or mojitos with crushed ice. There is a man who will cheaply refill your water bottle with filtered, safe water. I don't have his address, but can get it upon request.



Filling up water bottles, water guy, center.

RESTAURANTS



This map wasn't useful. We just walked around to find restaurants.

This is where a tour book would come in handy!

COMMUNICATION

- Normal phone & computer chargers will work
- Call your cell phone provider about texting in Cuba!
 - I have Verizon, and I've signed up for "pay as you go." The rates for texting are \$0.50 to send, \$0.05 to receive; \$2.99/minute for calls; bad signal - you can use this method;
 - I can also call, text or use data if I'm connected to wifi which is free!
 - I've been instructed to turn **OFF** cellular data so I'm not charged
 - Yes, I was able to text **SOMETIMES** successfully, but there are many pockets where your text just won't go through. And I'm not aware of any other carrier where texting is possible; none of the other company members could text or use their phones at all.
- Tourists can buy ETECSA prepaid wifi cards at special kiosks for \$2 – \$3 per hour of service. Wifi networks can be found at major hotels or in public parks.
 - Wifi pretty doesn't work at all, so I recommend to not even try. Ever. Even if you sit at a hotel, buy a wifi card, and connect to their internet, it probably won't work for more than 3 minutes. You **WILL NOT** be able to post to FB, save your photos to the cloud, send more than 1 or 2 emails your entire trip, etc.

MISC.

- Friends/family must visit as “people to people”
 - Bring itinerary [Don't need](#).
- You are now allowed to bring back \$400 worth of souvenirs, including up to \$100 worth of Cuban cigars
- Tips are appreciated! 10% on meals if it wasn't included in bill, \$1.00 CUC/person for short rides. [Sure, yes](#).
- [Info on traveling to Cuba](#)
 - You can't access this website once you're there!
 - You should definitely buy, **and bring with you**, a Cuba tour book ahead of time. Once you're there, you won't be able to “google” the good spots.
 - Go to the beach (Santa Maria) on the bus! It's beautiful. Yes, there are jellyfish, but none of us were stung ;) The bus trip only costs about \$5 each way, and we hopped on the bus from the stop in front of Hotel Inglaterra.
- [Learn some Spanish or brush up on your Spanish](#). You will have a MUCH MORE meaningful experience. Cubans are extremely friendly, and if you can speak their language and can ask questions, you will learn about them, their families, their culture, government, etc. Spanglish is acceptable ;)
- Do not travel to Cuba with a tour group. That's lame, and does not give you an authentic experience in Cuba.
- Do salsa dance with locals at restaurants, but they will likely ask you for money afterwards.



A peek inside a restaurant with live band and salsa dancers.

- If a Cuban wants to take you to get coffee, etc., that's great, but he will also ask you for money towards the end of your excursion.
- It must get terribly hot in the Summer as it was perfectly warm in Jan.
- While there is no violent crime in Cuba, there is opportunistic crime. My cell phone was sitting on the table at a restaurant, and was taken when I went to the bathroom (my husband and dad were sitting there). I think the waiter took it. I'm serious.

CONTACTS

You won't call anyone on a phone, text or email them. You will have to decide on a meeting place and time, or will walk around to find them.

Danza-Teatro Retazos

Amargura No. 61 E/Mercaderes Y San Ignacio

Habana Vieja, Ciudad de La Habana, Cuba

(53) 7 860 4341

(53) 7 866 0512

Tels: (537) 860-4341

(537) 860-4301

<http://www.danzateatroretazos.cu/>

Isabel Bustos Romoleroux, Artistic Director

ibustos@retazos.ohc.cu

Luisa Rodriguez

Office/studio: 866 0512

Isabel cell (53) 52709387

Isabel home (53) 72056328



First meeting with Isabel Bustos, Founder & Director of Retazos

SCHEDULE

People do not follow strict schedules in Cuba. Be flexible!

Sunday, Jan. 8, 2017

Arrive to Havana, Cuba on Delta Flight 2023:

5:55 AM Chicago ORD

9:03 AM Atlanta ATL

Delta Flight 639

11:15 AM Atlanta ATL

1:25 PM Havana HAV

Monday, Jan. 9, 2017

10-11am Class taught by Retazos

11-12:30pm Rehearsal led by Julia Rhoads, LPP

Artistic Director

12:30-1:30pm Lunch

1:30-3pm Rehearsal, led by Isabel Bustos, Retazos

3-3:15 Break

Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2017

11-12:30pm class taught by LPP (Megs/Michel translates)

12:30-1:30pm Rehearsal led by Julia with input from Isabel

1:30-2pm Lunch

2-3:30pm Rehearsal led by Isabel with input from Julia

3:30-3:45pm Conversation/summary

3:45-4pm Break

4-5pm LPP rehearsal if time

Thursday, Jan. 12, 2017

10-1pm Class taught by Retazos

11-12:30pm Rehearsal led by Isabel & Julia on what is needed

3:15-4:30pm Isabel and Julia lead rehearsal together based on the material so far

Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2017

10-12pm LPP rehearsal

12-1pm Lunch

1-1:15pm Group discussion reflecting on day before (Both companies)

1:15-3pm Rehearsal, driven by Isabel with input from Julia

3-3:15pm Break

3:15-5pm Rehearsal led by Julia with input from Isabel

12:30-1:30pm Lunch

1:30-4pm Rehearsal

4-5pm LPP separate rehearsal if time

Friday, Jan. 13, 2017

11-12pm Class taught by LPP (Michel)

12-1pm Lunch

1-5pm Technical rehearsal (with 15 min. Break in the middle)

5-6pm Break

7:00pm Performance

Saturday, Jan. 14, 2017

7:00pm Performance