



Havana: A Cultural and Literary Companion (Cities of Imagination)

Claudia Lightfoot

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A new and innovative series offering in-depth cultural, historical and literary guides to the great cities of the world. More than ordinary guidebooks, they introduce the visitor or armchair traveller to each city's unique present-day identity and its links with the past. From its humble birth as a few thatched huts along the shoreline, Havana has emerged from five hundred years of turbulent history as the most fascinating city in the Caribbean. Spain's "Pearl of the Antilles" was in turn plundered by pirates, invaded by foreign fleets and then turned into a Mafia-run playground under U.S. tutelage. Since 1959 the seat of Fidel Castro's revolutionary regime, Havana is now shaking off forty years of blockade to face the new challenges of mass tourism. A city whose fabric has always been threatened by hurricanes and political upheaval, Havana has developed a wild edge, an energy and an alluring exoticism that have intrigued and enchanted visitors as diverse as Alexander von Humboldt, Anais Nin, Lorca, and Sartre. Claudia Lightfoot explores Havana's history and its paradoxes: a city where architectural treasures survive among crumbling tenements; where a vibrant street life takes place amid shortages; where revolutionary politics, machismo, and a thriving black market co-exist against a background of salsa, griteria, and baseball. -- The city of architecture: fortresses, mansions, and Art Deco exuberance; baroque facades and balconies; an eclectic cityscape. -- The city of politics and exile: the colonial and neo-colonial years; wars, dictators, and revolution; Jose Marti and Che Guevara; the diaspora and the dream of Miami. -- The city of literature, art, and music: Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Cabrera Infante; passion and irony; Graham Greene and Hemingway; Wilfredo Lam and Nelson Dominguez; Afro-Cuban roots; salsa, rumba, son, and rap.

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