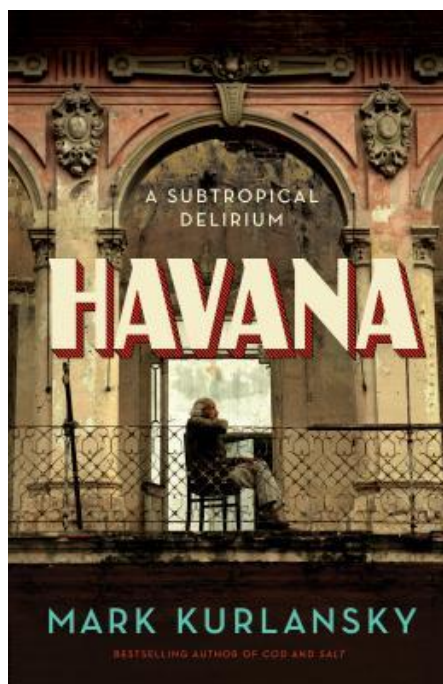




Havana: A Subtropical Delirium

Mark Kurlansky

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Award-winning author Mark Kurlansky presents an insider's view of Havana: the elegant, tattered city he has come to know over more than thirty years. Part cultural history, part travelogue, with recipes, historic engravings, photographs, and Kurlansky's own pen-and-ink drawings throughout, *Havana* celebrates the city's singular music, literature, baseball, and food; its five centuries of outstanding, neglected architecture; and its extraordinary blend of cultures.

Like all great cities, Havana has a rich history that informs the vibrant place it is today--from the native Taino to Columbus's landing, from Cuba's status as a U.S. protectorate to Batista's dictatorship and Castro's revolution, from Soviet presence to the welcoming of capitalist tourism. Havana is a place of extremes: a beautifully restored colonial city whose cobblestone streets pass through areas that have not been painted or repaired since the revolution.

Kurlansky shows Havana through the eyes of Cuban writers, such as Alejo Carpentier and José Martí, and foreigners, including Graham Greene and Hemingway. He introduces us to Cuban baseball and its highly opinionated fans; the city's music scene, alive with the rhythm of Son; its culinary legacy. Once the only country Americans couldn't visit, Cuba is now opening to us, as is Havana, not only by plane or boat but also through Mark Kurlansky's multilayered and electrifying portrait of the long-elusive city.

Havana: A Subtropical Delirium Details

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From Reader Review Havana: A Subtropical Delirium for online ebook

Lukasz Chmielewski says

Pereżka.

Książka napisana bardzo łatwo, przyjemnie, przystępnie, a jednocześnie pięknie, świetnie oddaje klimat podzwrotnikowego miasta. Kurlansky odwalił kawę dobrej roboty analizując wszystko to, co składa się na Hawanę - omówił jej historię, architekturę, tradycje kulinarne, językowo-lingwistyczne, muzyczne, sportowe, literackie w każdym rozdziale skupiając się na innym aspekcie uładanki. Choć pisze o detalach - nie zanudza, ani nie zasypuje czytelnika niepotrzebnymi informacjami (a to zawsze największa pokusa piszących monografie). W efekcie "Podzwrotnikowe delirium" to książka bardzo krótka (250 stron), ale niesamowicie konkretna - zupełnie inna od ciekawego, ale niesamowicie rozwleczonego "Stambułu" Kinga czy monumenalnej "Jerozolimy" Montefiore (którą czytam pół roku i zajmie mi pewnie jeszcze drugie tyle.) Przed wyjazdem na Kubę: must read.

Esil says

I've been to Cuba many times on holidays to warm my bones and get away from the cold Canadian winter for a few days. These were mostly resort vacations on Cuba's beautiful beaches. Quite a few years ago, a childhood friend and I were marking a common big birthday and we decided to spend a week in Havana, which was a different vacation altogether. We explored the neighbourhoods, we visited museums, monuments and the famed cemetery, we spent time on a beach with locals and we happened upon a huge political demonstration. I don't speak Spanish but my friend speaks Spanish, so we also had an opportunity to have some interesting conversations with a few residents of Havana -- for example, our female taxi driver who was a trained engineer but made more money driving taxis, and a journalist who gave us some insight into the challenges of reporting in Cuba. I came away amazed at this complex city with its beautiful crumbling old buildings and complex economic and social layers. And I felt like I only touched the tip of the iceberg.

Havana, written by Mark Kurlansky who also wrote Salt and Cod, was a great companion to my trip. In this relatively short book, Kurlansky surveys Havana's history, including the history of its slave trade, years of wealth and political turmoil, and more recent revolution. He explores issues of race and gender. He delves into Havana's literary, religious, architectural and musical histories. He explores Africa's influence on Havana and the Spanish spoken in Cuba. And much more. Every topic is explored briefly, so there isn't much room for depth but there's enough information to make it interesting. He also approaches Havana from a seemingly politically neutral position -- neither condemning nor romanticizing contemporary Havana but rather seeing some positive and some negative. Unusually for an American, Kurlansky appears to have traveled to Havana regularly since the early 1980s and his book is informed by research and his own observations and experiences. Ultimately, Havana feels like an ode to a complex, flawed but much loved city. I really enjoyed it given my own experience there, but I'm not sure how meaningful it would be to anyone who has not been to Havana or who doesn't plan to travel there. Thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Lee says

I enjoyed this compilation of history and culture. The author does a good job weaving together the details of Havana's history with the influence that had on its current way and state of being; and while his summary does leave me wanting to know more, his presentation of the highlights, so to speak, doesn't feel like too much of a skim. Rather, he tells you plenty for an interesting story.

Having visited Havana myself a few years back (albeit briefly), I also appreciated the author's ability to bring Havana to life on the page. As he describes current places and environments, I could easily match his descriptions to memories and images from my trip.

Finally, while he writes as a non-Cuban, I felt he made a reasonable effort to write from a relatively neutral perspective - neither endorsing nor criticizing the politics that also make Havana what it is today, but presenting it as it is.

Janine says

I've read this book twice within six weeks. First I read it before leaving for my trip to Cuba. Then I borrowed it again a couple of days ago, to refresh my memory before writing this review and I was immediately drawn into a second reading, recognizing things and places that I'd seen and kicking myself for the things I'd missed.

Mark Kurlansky is an American writer who has spent over thirty years visiting Cuba, and so he writes from an American, rather than Cuban perspective. He is a prolific author, with many of his non-fiction works centring on an object like Cod, Salt or Oysters, as well as the histories of the Basques, European Jewry or the effect of baseball on San Pedro de Macoris. In this book, he writes the history of Havana with affection, but you're always aware that it's an outsider's perspective. It's a very literary history, with many allusions to Hemingway, Marti and other more contemporary Cuban authors. The author is aware that these works might not be familiar to his readers, and so he translates his quotations and gives sufficient context to make them meaningful. The book meanders its way through a cornucopia of themes in a basically chronological fashion, although the revolution itself is not described in much detail. It is illustrated with 19th century woodcuts from magazines, and Kurlansky lets his words rather than images do the describing.

I was a little disappointed in the ending, which trailed off into a discussion of baseball, but having now seen the crowded baseball bleachers at a local small-town match, I have a better understanding of the Cuban love for the game.

That criticism aside, I really enjoyed this book, both before visiting Cuba and even more afterwards. In fact, I think that I inadvertently stumbled on the very best way to read it.

Dennis says

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I have never been to Havana, but since I live in "north Cuba" , aka south Florida, I have always been fascinated by Cuba and its culture. I found this to be a fascinating and enjoyable read. The author's writing style reads more like fiction than non-fiction. His books read like stories and not like dry, fact-filled textbook like reads that many non-fiction books tend to be. If an author can make me want to read about Cuba's fascination with baseball - a topic I have ZERO interest in (when I saw that it was coming up in the book I thought for sure I'd be skipping that section), then that is an author I want to read more of. What particularly endeared the book to me was that there were several references and quotes by Anthony Trollope - who not only happens to be one of my favorite Victorian authors, I also just happened to be reading one of Trollope's books at the same time I was reading this one.

This is the third book I have read by this author - the other two being "Salt" and "Birdseye" - and I will definitely be making my way through all his works.

Such a well written book and just what I needed after reading a book set in Havana and needing to know more. Kurlansky's writing style is extremely engaging; it's conversational and witty while still being informative and often lyrical. Although at times I wanted more of the politics or history, the book captures the place well (I'd imagine) for such a short book that spans so much time.

What's more, a place is more than just its politics, of course: it's the people, the food, the arts, the baseball, the spirit. Recipes, lyrics, jokes, etc. fill the pages of Havana here. Kurlansky seems to capture this place at full view by not just describing the location but also depicting its people -- Although I would be curious to see how a Cuban or Habanero would read the book.

Overall though I learned a lot and really couldn't put the book down.

A little bit of history,
a little bit of cultural observation (music, food, religion, baseball),
quite a bit of quotes from Cuban authors and others who have written about Havana,
a couple of recipes,
and very little politics which I thought was interesting because we're talkin about Cuba here.

A fairly short and breezy account that is enjoyable to read. Some of the stories that the author related about events were different versions than I heard when I visited Cuba but that stands to reason with anything that you are told word of mouth. However, I began to take it all with a grain of salt when he described the Cuban

flag as having red stripes like the American flag. Wow! What?! The Cuban flag has blue stripes!!

The best thing for me was the references and quotes from Cuban authors. Now I have a nice extension of my to-read list.

Justyna W. (Owca z Ksi??k?) says

<http://www.owcazksiazka.pl/2018/06/ma...>

Hawana to historia i ludzie o wszystkich kolorach skóry, boscy machos i pon?ne mulatas. To muzyka, taniec, po??danie i zazdrozna mi?o??. To wielkie pragnienia i jeszcze wi?ksze nadzieje. To kraina rumu i lodów w dwudziestu sze?ciu smakach. To miejsce, gdzie chrze?cija?stwo miesza si? z santerí?, a samobójstwo nikogo nie dziwi. Otoczona lazurów wod? wyspa, z której dobiegaj?ce modlitwy, ?miechy i krzyki gin? gdzie? po?ród fal. Dusz? Hawany jest transkultuacja. Przedziwny, niematerialny specyfik o trudnym do opisanie, wyj?tkowym smaku, który potrafi odurzy?, jak nic innego na ?wiecie i sprawia, ?e to miasto jest jak majak chorych oczu, przed którymi deliryczne wizje przelatuj?.¹ Kurlansky z uczuciem odda? cze?? Hawanie, odmalowa? jej portret za pomoc? s?ów. Wyszed? te? na przeciw moim pragnieniom i przywo?a? wielu wybitnych, wa?nych dla Kuby literatów.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

"Havana is not a city for people who are squeamish about sweat. Sweat is one of the many defining smells in redolent Havana and is a leitmotif in almost all Havana literature."

If you are familiar with Kurlansky's other non-fiction, for instance *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World* or *Salt: A World History*, imagine the same thorough look at a singular subject applied to the city of Havana. Mark Kurlansky has visited Cuba for decades, and has a great love for the city of Havana.

He examines history, architecture, politics, trade (especially ports!), food, music, and literature. Throughout the book he references characters or stories from Cuban literature, which I liked. At the end is an extensive bibliography of more reading, both fiction and non-fiction.

Thanks to the publisher for providing a review copy through NetGalley.

Joseph says

Stroll along the shady streets of Havana with Mark Kurlansky, a most trustworthy and entertaining tour guide.

Simply put, this is a beautifully written book, captivating from start to end. Kurlansky paints an indelible, wonderful portrait of a city and the Habaneros who have lived, thrived, struggled, and died there. So strike up a cigar, pour a few fingers of rum, and savor this book.

Barbm1020 says

This was a good read. I haven't been to Cuba and had heard and read conflicting reports about what life is like there. Now I'm looking forward to PBS' Great Performances chapter on the music that Kurlansky tells us is everywhere in that fabled city. A lot of history is presented here and a lot about the culture and what it's like to be there. My only problem with it is that he insists "The Americans" have been trying to starve the Cuban people with the trade embargo. Cuba has huge tracts of arable land. Why doesn't their government encourage farmers to own and work it and produce the food the people need? Has communism destroyed free enterprise to such an extent that there's really not enough to eat?

Christopher says

With the normalization of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States, the easing of travel restrictions to the island, and the death of Fidel Castro last year, more Americans will have the opportunity to visit this gem of the Caribbean soon (assuming the Trump administration doesn't decide to muck it all up). But large numbers of Americans have not visited the island in over 50 years. So what will they experience when they arrive? This book, written by a former foreign correspondent in Havana for the *Chicago Tribune*, not only gives people a sense of the history of the capital city, Havana, but of the people who have lived there in good times and bad.

Starting with the founding of the city by Spanish colonists in the 16th century, Mr. Kurlansky takes readers on a voyage through 400+ years of Havana history and culture. While following a broadly chronological order, the book also jumps from topic to topic as they crop up. It is a nearly flawless meshing of two different narrative methods of organization and I love it. But one of the greatest things Mr. Kurlansky does is root his history in the culture and struggles of the local people, the "Habaneros" as they call themselves.

One of the best examples of this is how Mr. Kurlansky peppers his narrative with the Habaneros' dark sense of humor, much of which is laugh out loud hysterical. One example that I can't pass up comes from the end of the book: (view spoiler) It's moments of dark humor like this that keep the reader engaged beyond just your typical political and social history.

Filled with fascinating historical moments, cultural insights and dark humor, Mr. Kurlansky gives readers a glimpse of the character of the Habaneros themselves. And that, to me at least, is more important than where to find the best frozen daiquiris on the island.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

Although I enjoyed Mark Kurlansky's newest nonfiction book *Havana*, I don't actually have a lot to say about it, simply because there's not much to it in the first place; not exactly a travel guide to this capital of Cuba, not exactly a history, and not exactly a memoir, it's instead a curious mix of them all, what you might call a "biographical sketch of a city" in the spirit of Peter Ackroyd's *London*. As such, then, it makes for

pleasant surface-level reading, a book that has a general theme per chapter but then spits out random factoids within each of these chapters, full of interesting trivia (did you know that the Sloppy Joe sandwich was invented in Cuba?), but that never really digs down into a deeper or more meaningful look at this fascinating, complicated city. With the Obamian normalization of relations between the US and Cuba, now has never been a better time to read a light but engaging book like this, one that will give most Americans their first look at this most curious of Caribbean destinations; hopefully it will serve to whet your appetite for more.

Out of 10: **8.5**

Diane S ? says

I have never been to Havana, the closest I have gotten is San Juan, Puerto Rico which I loved but which the author makes clear is a poor substitution for Havana. This was just enough of a biography of a city that has been remade several times over, though some things always stay the same the city has been through many upheavals. The Spanish, a pirate's paradise, the Americans and the mob, the storms that have ravaged the city, the fires set that have burned it down, but always it rises again.

The food, the culture, slavery, the mix of people, the mulattas, the music, the food, narrow streets, the architecture, and the dirt and grime. Hemingway is revered here, this was the place he made his longest home, drank in the bars, ate in the restaurants. The revolution, Castro and the things that changed. Interesting trivia, Hemingway hated sugar and Castro loved ice cream. Havana seems to be a city of its own, own vibes, its own atmosphere, its own smells. Beliefs, all the different beliefs combined, mix and match, Santeria from the African influence, so many blends of cultures here. Quite fascinating.

Loved the writing style but this is in no way a in depth study of the city but just enough for me, learned quite a bit and was entertained by this city I will probably never visit. Could quite literally not take the heat, and of course the sweat that permeates the air, covers the people, I do not find enticing. The city though I find extremely interesting, in thought only of course and I enjoyed the drawing, pictures and recipes that were included.

Linda Smatzny says

The book takes the reader thru the history of Havana by writing about its people, its architecture and its blend of cultures. Some of these are very different from the rest of Cuba. The author has been visiting Havana for over thirty years so has seen some of the changes. The book is short but was a quick easy read.

Collins says

It was a fun read with lots of little quirky things thrown in. The history was interesting and Kurlansky did a good job of bringing it up to the current time. Since I was fortunate enough to visit there several years ago - mostly Havana - it brought back many memories of places I visited and people I met. A very different country from any other I have visited, with it's combination of Spanish, African, Indigenous, and European, Christian, Catholic, Voodoo, and probably many other beliefs and cultures as well, it has come to have a population and culture very much it's own. Then you throw many years of isolation and communist/socialist thinking and rule into the pot and you come up with a truly unique and interesting people. And, many, many,

beautiful, or once were beautiful, buildings, parks and avenues, amidst much poverty and deterioration.

All-in-all, I'd say it's a good read for anyone interested in Cuba, what it was, and what it has become, not to mention recipes for Hemingway's Daqueris and Mojitos (without sugar). A book as unique as Cuba itself.

Evan Clark says

What *Midnight In The Garden of Good and Evil* did for Savannah and the Deep South, this does for Havana. Part history, part social commentary, with some minor adventures and snark thrown in, it serves as a very decent snapshot of an often misrepresented city.

Jane LaFazio says

I gave it a three, because I felt it was a bit uneven. Some parts were really good and some not so much. The book is a very broad overview of Cuba's history to current situation, with random facts through out. I'm going to Cuba next month, so it was a worthwhile read for me.

Carole says

Mark Kurlansky is such a good writer. It's like curling up with a friend over a cup of tea. Like many visitors, I came under the spell the city's crumbling (is there ever a description of Havana without this word?) splendor. Kurlansky captures its charm and adds much more. Bringing in history and culture, especially literature and love of poetry, he paints a full and rich picture of Habeneros past and present. He writes with unabashed affection for the colorful city and shares the peccadilloes of the inhabitants, including their ironic humor, love of music and baseball strategy, superstitions and good nature. It is a positive book, not focusing on the shortcomings of the regime, but on the rich blend of cultures that produce the complex appeal of this great city. Kurlansky writes from 30 years of experience. This is a delightful read for anyone who has been captivated by Havana and wishes to understand why.
