

CIENFUEGOS

DESTINATION GUIDE

MELIÃ HOTELS
INTERNATIONAL
CUBA

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INTRODUCTION

When UNESCO declared that the historic centre of Cienfuegos was a World Heritage Site in 2005 the organisation took many reasons into account. But one of the most important was that the city is the “first and an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble representing the new ideas of modernity, hygiene and order in urban planning as these developed in Latin America from the 19th century”.

Cienfuegos is a neoclassical city that differs from all the others in Cuba and America. This is partly because it was founded late (1819) by French colonists when Cuba was still under Spanish rule. In its declaration, UNESCO highlights that its architecture evolved from its neoclassical beginnings to become more eclectic, while retaining its harmony as an overall townscape. Particularly interesting buildings are: Government Palace (City Hall), San Lorenzo School, the Bishopric and Ferrer Palace. And its best neoclassical buildings dating from the 19th century include: Tomás Terry Theatre, Spanish Casino, Palatino Tavern and Blanco Palace, which is also a Local Monument. The House of Lions, the house-warehouse of the Spanish merchant José García de la Noceda, the Customs Building and the renowned La Unión Hotel, currently managed by Meliá,



where famous people such as the ballerina Anna Pavlova and the Captain General Arsenio Martínez Campos have stayed.

But the wealth of heritage does not just lie in the city's buildings; Cienfuegos is full of history, culture and special traditions and legends, many dating from before the Spanish conquest. The waters of the fabulous Jagua Bay bathing the city were home to the Jagua cacicazgo (chiefdom) of the Ciboney people, who told a fable on the origin of man. According to this famous legend, when Guanaroca, the first Ciboney woman, lost her son, her tears gave rise to the rivers, the fish and the keys that today form the bay.

This is where Governor Diego de Velázquez and his men landed at the beginning of the 16th century. From here the

conquistadors set off in 1514 to found the towns of Trinidad and Sancti Spíritus. And on one Assumption Day, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas gave his famous sermon of repentance here, before returning to Spain and dedicating his life to defending the rights of the native population. In 1745, long before the city was founded, Cienfuegos had a

fortress called Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles (Our Lady of the Angels) in Jagua. This was quite unusual as it wasn't just any old stronghold, but rather the third in importance on the island after the Tres Reyes Magos del Morro (Three Magi of the Promontory) Fortress in Havana and San Pedro de la Roca (St Peter of the Rock) Castle in Santiago de Cuba.

Cienfuegos is the only city in the country with a triumphal arch; singers as famous as Caruso have performed in its Tomás Terry Theatre; the fallen in its battlefields during the War of Independence include Brigadier General Henry Reeve, fighting for the Cuban Mambí Army, who was nicknamed the Inglesito (Little Englishman) because he was from the United States; and the greatest Cuban singer, the Bárbaro del Ritmo, Benny Moré, began his career in Cienfuegos.

01

THE FIRST SETTLERS



Cienfuegos wouldn't be Cienfuegos without the sea. Because it's the sea and its sheltered bay that attracted the first native settlers and afterwards the Spanish conquistadors to the area. And these same waters help make Cienfuegos so special, as this Frenchified city's architecture and urban development are unique in Cuba, which is why it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Site in 2005.

Cienfuegos had Spanish colonists and French founders. But before that its gentle waters cradled Ciboney natives from the former Jagua cacicazgo, who settled on the shores of this splendid 88-km2 pocket bay with

a narrow, protected entrance channel that amazed Sebastián de Ocampo when he sailed around the island of Cuba in 1509.

The first to settle in Cuba were the Guanahatabey and then the peaceful Ciboney, immigrants from the Amazon who travelled to the island by canoe through the bridge of the Lesser Antilles, bringing with them their culture of shells, snails and small molluscs that were the basis of their food and formed their objects. The Ciboney had some agricultural knowledge and produced very primitive pots. But their culture was vastly inferior to that of the Taino people, who were ceramicists, textile

craftspeople, manufacturers of phallic idols and cassava graters. They arrived on the island afterwards and settled in eastern Cuba by conquering the Ciboney.

Some of the Ciboney living in the seas south of the island's centre formed the Jagua cacicazgo. These were the people that started the first legends in the area, such as the one about [Guanaroca](#); fish, turtles and the tears shed by this first Ciboney woman when she lost her son, Imao, transformed into Guanaroca Lagoon and the rivers, peninsulas, keys and lagoons of the fabulous Jagua Bay, on whose shores Cienfuegos was founded in 1819.

02

COLUMBUS, DIEGO DE VELÁZQUEZ AND FRIAR BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS



Around 1494, on his second voyage to America, Christopher Columbus stopped over in Jagua Bay to stock the caravels La Niña, La Juana and La Cordero with water and wood, thus providing Europe with the first mention of this place, which

he called Misas Port. In 1509, when Sebastián de Ocampo sailed completely around the island for the first time, he also stopped over during his long voyage on one of the keys inside the fabulous inlet (the current Cayo Ocampo). He later informed the King of Spain that "... this port, called Jagua by its inhabitants, is one of the best and safest for a thousand ships in the world".



The island of Hispaniola was the centre of the New World at the time. The first encomiendas, the colony's primitive production system based on enslaving the indigenous population, were established there. By 1511 the Governor of the Indies, Nicolás de Ovando,

had already sent Diego de Velázquez to conquer and colonise Cuba and become its governor. He was joined on that expedition by 300 men, including Hernán Cortes, Pedro Alvarado, Juan de Grijalva and Friar Bartolomé de las Casas as the chaplain. The latter had been the holder of an encomienda in Hispaniola and later became the great defender of the native population's rights.

This group was joined by Pánfilo de Narváez from Jamaica. He was one of the men responsible for the famous slaughter in [Caonao](#), a locality near the current Camagüey, in which the conquistadors massacred hundreds of indigenous people in an episode that Las Casas brutally described in his "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies".

The first town founded in Cuba by Velázquez in the summer of 1511 was Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Baracoa, in the north-eastern end of the island. It was followed by San Salvador de Bayamo. Eager to conquer more, after overcoming indigenous resistance and burning the Taino chief Hatuey at the stake, Velázquez and his men continued to advance towards the west of the island and again reached Jagua Bay.

Despite Jagua Bay's excellent natural conditions and fertile soil, gold wasn't plentiful there and so establishing a town in that Ciboney cacicazgo (chiefdom) was ruled



out. However, this was where Velázquez ordered his men to go out and found Trinidad and Sancti Spíritus in 1514 because the prospects of finding gold-bearing sands were better there, a belief that turned out to be false.

In Hispaniola, [Friar Bartolomé](#) had heard the preaching of the Dominican Friar Antonio de Montesinos criticising the conquistadors for maltreating the indigenous population; nevertheless, he still defended the encomienda system and for participating in the colonisation of Cuba he was given some indigenous people and land near the mouth of the River Arimao in Jagua Bay.

This was where Las Casas realised that this system imposed by the colonists was unfair and so on Assumption Day, 15 August 1514, aged 30, he set off from Jagua to give his famous [sermon of repentance](#) in which he publicly renounced his encomienda and began his fight to defend the indigenous population in the recently founded town of Sancti Spíritus. These historic places can today be visited and form a unique route.

03

THE FIRST COLONISTS AND PIRATES



Some time after Friar Bartolomé de las Casas left, new Spanish colonists peacefully settled on the shores of Jagua Bay. Agriculture, fishing and livestock rearing were safe resources, as was fine hardwood that was abundant in this place and which centuries later were used to make and repair boats and to build mansions in Havana, Trinidad and, beyond the seas, even to embellish some rooms and ceilings in the Royal Palace in Madrid.

It wasn't strange to see colonists pairing up with indigenous women. In the beginning, the governors of Hispaniola and Cuba even encouraged the new settlers to marry the daughters or relatives of the main chiefs to expand alliances and increase their wealth with the lands they possessed.



One of these first Spanish colonists was José Díaz, who lived where Jagua Hotel now stands. According to legend, he sheltered a mysterious woman on his ranch who left a pirate in his care and who a few months later became the mother of a beautiful girl called [Azurina](#).

Another Spaniard, called Lope, married a beautiful Ciboney woman around 1528 and they had a daughter

who they called Mari. She gave rise to the legend of [Marilope](#) symbolised by the yellow flower with an intense sulphur tone known by this name. It is typical of the southern region where it grows wild in dry and rocky areas.

Both stories, whether real or made up, formed two of the most wonderful colonial legends of Jagua Bay. And it is no coincidence that both also concerned pirates and corsairs that took refuge in such a sheltered bay or even temporarily settled in its inner keys.

Famous pirates visiting Jagua Bay were Jacques de Sores in 1554, Francis Drake in 1586, and John Morgan, Jean the Reckless and Gilberto Girón when they were active. The region's inhabitants traded with them, thus smuggling out their products as there was no other outlet due to the mother country's restrictive policies.

Quite a few believe that pirates buried the amazing treasure they plundered in coastal areas, such as Caletón de Don Bruno, Jucaral and west of Cayo Carenas, but nothing has been found so far.

04

NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LOS ÁNGELES FORTRESS IN JAGUA

A curious fact in the history of Cienfuegos is that it had a fortress (called Our Lady of the Angels) in its enormous bay before it became a city. And it wasn't just a simple fort or stronghold, as it was the third in importance on the island after Tres Reyes Magos del Morro (Three Magi of the Promontory) Castle in Havana and San Pedro de la Roca (St Peter of the Rock) Castle in Santiago de Cuba. All three have been declared National Monuments.

A sustained economy based on livestock rearing and tobacco growing began to take hold from the end of the 16th century. In the 18th century, wax, wood and sugar started to become important, although they were sold illegally in an unstable market by residents to foreign smugglers, who used the bay as they pleased because the mother country turned a blind eye. Several failed attempts



were made throughout history to fortify the place and the situation didn't change until 1735 when a Royal Order authorised the sending of troops to protect the coasts. The decision to build the Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles Fortress

topped by a hemispherical dome resembling an eye watching over the ever-tranquil waters. The fortress is protected by a high wall hiding the lower level, containing a central courtyard and two sentry boxes at the corners of the firing platform

in Jagua was made in 1742. Construction was managed by the French military engineer Joseph Tantete, who arrived in Cuba in 1732 and completed the fortress in 1745. Tantete stayed in Cuba and completed several constructions including the commemorative column erected in Havana in 1754 where a ceiba tree once stood. The column is still preserved at Templete.

Set a short distance above the western shoreline, halfway along the narrow entrance to the bay, this is a solid stone construction with a cubic structure on two levels with a moat, drawbridge and a tower



overlooking the sea. The entire fortress copies the style of the prestigious French engineer Sebastián Le Pestre Vauban, who designed his own fortification system known as Vauban. This system establishes a harmonious relationship between the landscape, relief and geometrical shapes.

The castle was equipped with 10 cannons with different calibres, as this number was deemed sufficient to fend off pirate ships. But they didn't consider that pirates also had small boats that could enter the huge bay using one of the mouths of Arimao, a river that has two branches, one flowing into the sea and the other, called the Derramadero de las Auras, feeding into Guanaroca Lagoon, which, in turn, is linked to the bay by an estuary. And so, despite the fortress and its cannons, the daring pirates continued to get up to their old tricks in the bay with total impunity and without running any major risks. To stop them from getting in, a palisade had to be built—traces of which can still be seen today—covering the Derramadero de las Auras. This finally freed the bay from regular and inconvenient pirate visits.

In 1762, the fortress played an important role in the history of Cuba when it became a meeting place for Spanish boats and military units deployed in the island's interior, from where they set off to reconquer Havana, which had been taken by the English. Consequently, the territory became a stronghold of the Spanish military command until the invaders withdrew a year later after agreements with Spain, which preferred to give up Florida rather than the Cuban capital.

The first Commander of the fortress was Juan Castilla Cabeza de Vaca. Besides being in the military, he was a businessman whose initiative led to the first sugar mill in Jagua. Named Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria, it was founded on land belonging to the Caunao estate a league away from the bay. Almost from the time it was first built, the fortress has been linked to several legends. The most famous is about the ghost called the [Blue Lady](#).



05

THE FOUNDING OF THE SETTLEMENT AND THE TOWN

It took 75 years from the construction of Jagua Fortress until the city was at last established on 22 April 1819, founded by colonists from Bordeaux under the command of the French Lieutenant Colonel Luis De Clouet y Favrot. Thus it became the only city in America under the Spanish Crown that was planned, designed and founded by the French. And this fact, coupled with its appearance and creation, turned it into the most Frenchified city in Cuba.

In 1798 the brothers Félix and Francisco Lemaux, military engineers that were part of the Mopox Commission (1796–1802), sons of the famous Carlos Lemaux, a French military engineer who served King Charles III, designed the first plan to found a port city and shipyard on the Majagua Peninsula of Jagua Bay. It was a proposal that Honorato de Bouyón, the Commander of the Corps of Engineers and Brigadier of the



Royal Naval Station of Havana, took up again in 1816. Previously, between 1800 and 1804, Alexander von Humboldt had recognised the poor economic development of the bay and the relative isolation of its small population in his studies of Cuba.

In 1817 the International Treaty was signed establishing the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, one of the reasons why Captain General José Cienfuegos Jovellanos and Intendant Alejandro Ramírez encouraged white smallholders capable of making Cuba self-sufficient to cultivate the land. Bishop Espada—Juan José Díaz Espada y Fernández de Landa—also backed these ideas supporting the proposal De Clouet put forward.

Don Luis Juan Lorenzo De Clouet was an official born in Bordeaux, France, and based in Louisiana. Attached to General Staff in Havana in 1818, he suggested founding a colony in Jagua Bay to the Captain General



José Cienfuegos and the Intendant Ramírez on 1 January 1818. A year previously, taking advantage of his high degree as a Freemason, he had founded the first Masonic Chamber for High Degrees in Cuba in Havana.

On 8 March 1819 De Clouet signed the white colonisation contract with the Captain General and his Intendant based on the Royal Warrant dated 21 October 1817. In the founding proposal, De Clouet included a detailed budget that came to 162,000 pesos. It included transport and settlement costs for the colonists, food and the purchase of farm tools.

In April the doctor Domingo Monjenié and the surveyor Domingo Dubroct arrived in Jagua Bay with 46 French colonists and they settled at the Hurtado site near the banks of the River Salado. They lived in abandoned huts and in eight tents and began to design the first plans. On 19 April Don Agustín de Santa Cruz y de Castilla arrived and convinced De Clouet to move the population to Majagua Peninsula, owned by his wife, Antonia Guerrero, who made the land available to him.

On 22 April 1819, De Clouet took possession of the land in the name of His Majesty the King of Spain in front of the residents who knelt to listen to him under a leafy majagua, the legendary tree that Ciboney fables associated with infidelity. He told the colonists to consider this place as their only homeland, appealed for divine favour and asked for the King's orders to be observed. He then spoke the motto: Faith, Work and Union.

Second Lieutenant Boullón Turner traced the first residential block from the old majagua tree, and the settlement continued growing with the same straight-line design as new waves of French families arrived from New Orleans, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

A foundation document included the joint decision to name the settlement Fernandina de Jagua. This was changed on 20 May 1829 when the King granted it town status and the name Cienfuegos in honour of Don José Cienfuegos, the island's Captain General. Cienfuegos was granted city status by Royal Order dated 10 December 1880 in consideration of "the increase in its population, the gradual development of its agricultural and industrial wealth and the importance of its maritime port".



06

MONUMENT CITY



Cienfuegos is an exceptional example of 19th-century Latin American town planning. Its elegant and perfect draughtboard design, which extends to its urban limits, is a prime example of neoclassical culture. It also has a wealth of monuments in public spaces and properties of all styles, including magnificent buildings showcasing eclectic, art deco and modern movement architecture. Together they create a constructive coherence that underlines the high urban and architectural value of the ensemble. Cienfuegos is known for the elegant and modern lines of its continuous facades in blocks without porticos, except for buildings in squares and avenues.

Distinguished public spaces, such as the former Plaza de Armas (now José Martí Park)—the founding heart of the city and now considered the most beautiful square in the country—Paseo del Prado, the ensemble's backbone, and the busy San Fernando boulevard and the pedestrian avenue Santa Isabel, are the main places frequented by Cienfuegos residents for social and leisure activities. Some of the buildings, for example Tomás Terry Theatre, the Cathedral, Government Palace, the House of Lions, Blanco Palace, the former Liceo, the two cemeteries, García de la Noceda House-Warehouse, Ferrer Palace and La Unión Hotel, deserve special attention because they elevate the ensemble and form part of its architectural and environmental harmony. Also extremely significant





are its small palaces and array of lookout towers, domes and pediments forming the city's skyline. These identifying elements like no other stand out in the extensive architectural heritage and qualify the urban whole.

The city is an unbeatable ensemble of assets closely linked to the sea, which is the real star of the wealth and physical and spiritual identity of Cienfuegos residents. That is why it has been acknowledged nationally and internationally as the Beautiful City of the Sea and the Pearl of the South. This bay, the constant refuge of the most well-known corsairs and pirates, was called the Great Port of the Americas before Cienfuegos was founded. It's a nickname that recognises the excellent conditions of its pocket bay, a source of inspiration and wealth, a shell opening to the world with major environmental, commercial and tourism possibilities.

Not only does the historic centre of Cienfuegos contain the city's most valuable cultural and historical assets, it also

inspires the most care and attention for them. Years of hard systematic preservation work to recover its main buildings and public spaces, and safeguard the integrity of the whole rather than just individual constructions, have managed to restore these places and their surrounding areas to their splendour for both residents and visitors alike, influenced by a model 19th-century city respected by all.

As a result, Cienfuegos was declared a National Monument in 1995, the only city founded in the 19th century granted this category. Later the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, at its 29th annual session held in Durban, South Africa, on 15 July 2005, unanimously approved to grant the Urban Historic Centre of Cienfuegos the category of Cultural World Heritage as Cienfuegos is the first exceptional example of an architectural ensemble representing the new ideas of modernity, hygiene and order in the urban design of Latin America in the 19th century.

07

ARCHITECTURE

Plaza de Armas square (now José Martí Park)

19th century–beginning of 20th century.



The architectural and urban basis of Cienfuegos can be seen in this square, where architectural styles demonstrate the representative importance of its city status. The foundation square was the starting point for the design of the city, marked by a large granite circle.

It is also linked to the touching legend of the mermaid [Aycayia](#) and thus keeps the memory of the indigenous population's century-old majagua tree alive. Believed by the Ciboney to be a charm to prevent infidelity, the tree later bore witness to the sacred ritual of blessing the site and its first settlers.

The main administrative, religious and social buildings are found in this area: the City Hall, the Cathedral, Tomás Terry Theatre, the former San Lorenzo School, the Spanish Casino, Ferrer Palace, Palatino and other domestic buildings. Designed by the colony's founder and surveyor, it followed the monumental lines of design devised by the 1798 engineers. Today we can marvel at its size compared with other 19th-century Cuban cities. Its highlights include the sculptures in honour of José Martí, the harbour, the only triumphal arch in Cuba erected to commemorate the establishment of the Republic, the two lions carved out of marble at one of its entrances, symbol of the monarchy, and the fountains and busts erected in memory of famous Cienfuegos residents. It is amazing how residential, government, teaching, religious and public entertainment functions have blended together in the extensive space without altering the elegance and uniformity of the ensemble.



Purísima Concepción (Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception) Cathedral

*Calle 29, no. 5406 on the corner with Avenida 56
(Santa Isabel on the corner with San Carlos)*

It was erected in 1819 in the city's foundation square and later rebuilt and then redeveloped into its current state by the US engineer James Murray between 1867 and 1870. The facade is neoclassical with the use of the Doric order both inside and out, and its towers are strangely irregular as their width and height differ. The residents organised a public collection to construct the first smaller tower, which was not removed during the extension works, resulting in this unusual asymmetry in a neoclassical church. It has 12 chapels, six on each side, inspired by the symbology of the 12 Apostles, which is also seen in the 12 top stained-glass windows. Two more chapels are at the front, one dedicated to Christ and the other to Our Lady. The parish house at the back of the cathedral, built at the start of the 20th century, is neo-Gothic in style, which is more in keeping with ecclesiastical devotion.



Luis D'Clouet's House

*Calle 29, no. 5402 on the corner with Avenue 54
(Santa Isabel on the corner with San Fernando)*

The house belonged to the city's founder, Don Louis de Clouet. Its current appearance has stayed the same since it was rebuilt in 1841. Given the year when it was built, it is one of the oldest and most important buildings in the city, linked to the memory of the colony's founder. Especially noteworthy are its simple lines and sound construction of its portico overlooking the square. The second floor, set back from the facade line, allowed its owners to participate and be seen in the Plaza de Armas, a solution that augmented their social status.



City Hall / Headquarters of the Poder Popular Provincial (Provincial People's Power)

*Avenida 54, no. 2704–2706 on the corner with Calle 29
(San Fernando on the corner with Santa Isabel)*

The agreement to build the current Provincial Palace in the city dates from 1928 when the National Capitol created a trend for monumental domes. However, the architect Talleda Lugones responded to this desire with a cultured European reference and built a Tuscan dome, which was to serve as a visual landmark in the city, as part of his design for the City Hall based on the style of the famous Florence Cathedral. The building was opened on 20 May 1950 and its monumental style of modern historicism was soon the



setting for one of the first revolutionary events in Cienfuegos, the uprising of 5 September 1957.

Spanish Casino / Provincial Museum

*Avenida 54, no. 2702 on the corner with Calle 27
(San Fernando on the corner with San Luis)*



In the last decades of the 19th century, the colonial power promoted Spanish education and leisure associations and friendly societies since the Cuban people's separatist leanings rose after the first War of Independence. Spanish casinos built in the main cities were one of the outcomes. The casino in Cienfuegos was completed by the master builder Juan Pons between 1891 and 1893 and it is one of the best examples of its type. It is classically academic in style, with beautiful arcades overlooking the square. Inside the decor boasts iron railings, stained-glass windows, marble floors and paintings on the panels covering the ceilings and walls of its rooms.

The institution continued throughout the 20th century despite the increase in Spanish emigration. Cienfuegos opened a high-profile sanatorium for the local Spanish colony in the first decade of the century financed by the casino's shareholders. With a total of eight sections distributed in an original layout, it is still used today as a community polyclinic.

San Lorenzo and Santo Tomás Schools

*5 de Septiembre Basic Secondary School. Avenida 56, no. 2703 on the corner with Calle 29
(San Carlos on the corner with Santa Isabel)*



Following the desires of Don Nicolás Acea expressed in his 19th-century will, the engineer Jorge Lafuente completed the building for the San Lorenzo School (for boys) and the Santo Tomás School (for girls) between 1926 and 1927. Both were to honour the memory of his deceased son Tomás Lorenzo. The minimum capacity was 200 girls and 200 boys with separate entrances. The building's symmetrical inner structure and axial composition of its facade respond to its pupils' different genders. The main facade overlooking the square is harmonious in design around a strictly classic pediment and two side sections for each school.

Domingo Sarriá Valdespino's House / today Bar Palatino

*Avenida 54, no. 2512 and 2514 on the corner with
Calle 27 (San Fernando on the corner with San Luis)*

Believed to be one of the oldest buildings in Cienfuegos, which is why it is different from others surrounding the Plaza Mayor or Martí Park. It was built of stone with a tile roof as a home at the beginning of the 1840s. In the 1850s it was bought as a residence by a rich sugar-plantation owner from Trinidad Domingo Sarriá. Its low facade and arcades with oblong arches make it look primitive, an impression consolidated by its undulating baroque moulding on its side facade and, above all, by the curious bottle shape of its column shafts, which is not very common on the island. These details turn it into an exceptional example of Cienfuegos architecture, which



later lent towards the uniform 19th-century modernity of neoclassicism.

Lázaro Díaz de Tuesta's House and neoclassical homes

Cuban Fund of Cultural Assets. Avenida 54, no. 2506 between Calle 25 and Calle 27 (San Fernando between Bouyón and San Luis) / Universal Art Gallery. Avenida 56, no. 2505 between Calle 25 and 27 (San Carlos between Bouyón and San Luis)



Both residential developments, dating from the 1890s, highlight the hierarchy and importance of the space in



Plaza de Armas and the construction quality that had to be maintained by municipal authorities and private owners in

new residential buildings surrounding the square. There are two lines or strips of facades built on both sides of the open space, north and south, with only three years difference between them. Instead of fragmenting the continuous effect of the facades, they managed to maintain it with a unitary design to make it seem just one monumental building.

The first, built in 1890, has more solid and compact arches and columns, while the second, dating from 1893, has a more highly refined classically academic decor in a series of Roman arcades with profuse mouldings. They maintain a visual rhythm of well-proportioned pilasters, entablatures, cornices and balustrades forming an extraordinary architectural gallery of such expressive quality that few Cuban cities can boast of. Behind these two portico sections are the inner openings of the facade of houses with a unitary design, a wealth of railings and equally valuable joinery.

Ferrer Palace / Benjamín Duarte House of Culture

Calle 25, no. 5401–5403 on the corner with Avenida 54 (Bouyón on the corner with San Fernando)

Ferrer Palace, the residence of the Catalan merchant and sugar-plantation owner José Ferrer Sirés, was built between 1917 and 1918 by the Cienfuegos engineer and architect Pablo Donato Carbonell, who graduated in Barcelona. The project abandoned the neoclassical style that was previously dominant in the houses around José Martí Park to seek a more individual stylistic expression and eclectic decoration that was unlike familiar orders. The balconies that jut out on the top floor adopt a variety of solutions, especially the circular balcony with the mirador above, which focuses expressive attention on the corner where it is located. The main rooms contain magnificent ironwork

and plasterwork, especially the ceiling of the main function room that boasts rococo decoration. Especially noteworthy is the artistic quality of the colour tilework enamelled with metal highlights. Its owner became famous when Enrico Caruso stayed in his recently completed house and he drove the tenor around the city in his car.

The architect Carbonell was responsible for a similar project with a decorated balcony on the corner in the building for the shop El Palo Gordo, which he built in 1914 where Calle 54 meets Calle 33. It was one of the first buildings in the city to use reinforced concrete.



Tomás Terry Theatre

Avenida 56, no. 2701 on the corner with Calle 27 (San Carlos on the corner with San Luis)



The theatre was built by the Terry family to honour Don Tomás Terry y Adán, a wealthy merchant and city benefactor. In an exceptional case in colonial architecture, the design was put up for tender and won by the Lieutenant Colonel of Engineers Lino Sánchez Mármol, who was also in charge of building it. Work began on 29 December 1887 and the building was opened on 12 February 1890. Like all the theatres built in the 19th century, it has a typical horseshoe auditorium that can hold 1,200 spectators decorated in a sober style. Together with Esteban or Sauto (1863) in Matanzas, and La Caridad (1885) in Santa Clara, it is one of the three most important and best preserved colonial theatres in the country. The sculpture of Tomás Terry, a work of art with great artistic and historic value by the Italian sculptor Tomasso Solari, made of white marble in Naples, was erected inside in 1889. Internationally famous figures and cast have trodden its boards: [Enrico Caruso](#), Jorge Negrete, Anna Pavlova, Sarah Bernhardt, Ernesto Lecuona and Bola de Nieve, to name but a few.

The Royal Bank of Canada and National Bank of Cuba

Credit and Commerce Bank. Avenida 56, no. 5603 on the corner with Calle 31 (San Carlos on the corner with D'Clouet) / Popular Savings Bank. Avenida 52, no. 5019 on the corner with Calle 31 (Argüelles on the corner with D'Clouet)

In the first decades of the 20th century banks multiplied with the introduction of foreign capital and the country's financial development. The branches these firms opened in the island's population centres were identified by a typical architectural design that was repeated in the most prosperous cities. Two of these administrative buildings typical of the time and now over a century old have been preserved in Cienfuegos: the Royal Bank of Canada and the National Bank of Cuba. Both reproduce the components of classical language on their facades to offer an image of power, security and confidence to their customers by using coupled Corinthian columns. The branch of the Royal Bank of Canada, a foreign banking firm that has been established in Cuba since the 19th century, stands out for combining the manager's residence with the ground floor for offices and cash desks behind the same facade. This made it necessary to use a monumental order of coupled columns to make the whole look grand and solid and to imitate the texture of stone blocks on the exterior walls.



Art Deco apartment building

Calle 35, no. 5809 between Avenida 58 and Avenida 60 (Gazel between Santa Cruz and Santa Elena)

The Art Deco style with its colourful linear design was well received in Cuban cities as it allowed taste to update to the fashion of graphic propaganda with more functional and less cluttered designs. This apartment building erected in 1939 is the most important example of the new style playing with colour and decoration to achieve its modern effect.



La Unión Hotel

*Calle 31, no. 5401 on the corner with Avenida 54
(D'Clouet on the corner with San Fernando)*

In the second half of the 19th century, the port of Cienfuegos had overtaken Trinidad's as the sugar export port and it was an active meeting point for the island's southern cabotage shipping lines and commercial traffic in the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic. This commercial boom led to buildings offering accommodation. One of the oldest and largest hotels was La Unión, built on land that the Venezuelan merchant Tomás Terry y Adán had

purchased from his brother-in-law Pedro Dorticós, a descendant of the first French colonists of Jagua. In 1885, Natividad Terry Dorticós, resident in France, joined this land inherited from his parents to construct a three-storey building that is the current hotel, which he leased to Faustino Forbés. It soon became famous and received guests from Cuba and abroad who came for the quality of its services, its speciality French cuisine and for having electric light throughout its premises. The island's Captain General Arsenio Martínez Campos was staying there when he received notice that the Spanish army had been defeated on 15 December 1895 in the Bad Weather Battle.

The following century, its guests included celebrities from a variety of professions and ranks, such as the world chess champion José Raúl Capablanca, the ballerina Anna Pavlova, and the Cuban president Tomás Estrada Palma.



San Carlos Hotel

*Avenida 56, no. 3303–3309 between Calle 33 and
Calle 35 (San Carlos between Hourruitiner and Gazel)*

The construction of San Carlos Hotel was begun in 1921. Designed by the architect Alfredo Colli Franconetti, the architect Joaquín Carbonell Cabrera took over as manager of the project until it was completed in 1924. The street it is named after inherited an old legend from the times when it was one of the borders of the new town where residents were haunted by a [ghostly caiman](#). Now it was the site of modernity in Cienfuegos where the new hotel was erected as a six-storey property with a roof garden, imitating the style of US buildings that were going up in Havana at the time. However, this was quite a challenge far from the capital, since the new metal structures for this type of building were difficult to erect outside the sphere of the construction companies in Havana.

It was the highest building in the central region of Cuba, considered the city's most outstanding vista point, and it had 80 rooms on its four accommodation levels. As a result, it was a visual focus of interest in the urban structure and a valuable example of civil and public architecture.



Compañía de Seguros y Fianzas

*Organización Básica Eléctrica
(electricity company).*

*Avenida 56, no. 5602–5604
on the corner with Calle 33
(San Carlos on the corner
with Hourruitiner)*

The property built next to San Carlos Hotel was the administrative building of the Compañía de Seguros y Fianzas insurance firm. The work of the architect and engineer Luis Gálvez in 1923, it was similar in style but lower, thus adding to the modern visual ensemble of the urban landscape of Cienfuegos with its shapes. Designed as a functional building with no continuous balconies, its main section, fretted by the isolated openings of numerous rooms, is only decorated by lines of pilasters up to the height of overhanging eaves.

Blanco Palace

Office and trade building. Avenida 54, no. 3301–3307, 5402–5404 on the corner with Calle 33 (San Fernando on the corner with Hourruitiner)



motif, a symbol of Cuba, perhaps the only one used in this type of figurative decoration. The star of this palace is an imperial staircase (two flights) made of fine Cuban hardwood. It links the floors and the mezzanine until it ends in two spiral staircases leading to the mirador tower. It is one of the most beautiful

Like most 19th-century Cuban ports, the link between the merchant's or sugar-plantation owner's house and the storage of his products led to a variety of extremely important architectural solutions for the heritage of old towns. Not only were they large and spacious, but their designs were also highly original. This remarkable house, whose construction began between 1871 and 1878, owned by the sugar-plantation owner José Quesada, was completed by Manuel de Blanco. His name was forever linked to the palace, which is how the locals called the largest residences of this kind. Designed as a house-warehouse, it is arranged around a large square courtyard with a wealth of construction solutions. The facade is adorned with traditional neoclassical elements: Tuscan pilasters, straight overhangs and cornices. The balustrade protecting the balcony forms an intricate lace of flowers and the stained-glass windows incorporate the Royal Palm

residences outside the country's capital and one of the most valuable examples of 19th-century domestic Cuban architecture because of its formal and functional composition, the materials used and its architectural and decorative assets.

Although it looks like just one building, it is actually the union of two and it has been categorised as a Local Monument since 1990. It has been used by the Spanish Bank, Cervantes Bookshop, the Record House, a milk storage facility, a pharmacy, Arco House, La Perla textile shop, the Provincial Offices of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, the Catholic Association of the Knights of Columbus, the notary's office of Federico Laredo Bru (he was president of the republic for a brief period), the University Chapter, El Embajador shop and so on.

Cienfuegos Independent Customs House

Avenida 46, no. 2901 between Calle 29 and Calle 31 (La Mar between Santa Isabel and D'Clouet)



The construction of buildings to be used as custom houses is a long-standing tradition that resulted in significant designs within Cuban architecture. The laws of the Indies included the customs house as one of the buildings to be erected in the ports and the first public building built on the island in the 16th century was the customs house in Havana. The first design by the Lemaur engineers to urbanise Majagua peninsula included a special location for the customs house overlooking an open square in the harbour, and the founding of Cienfuegos soon included the proposal in its building programme. Its customs house is one of the oldest public buildings of its type on the island, constructed by the master builder Manuel Zumalave between 1841 and 1842. The building, with spacious dimensions and rooms for storing goods, has a wide facade that prioritised the main entrance with semi-circular arches on the ground floor and iron balconies on the floors above. It has a strategic location overlooking an open space that served as an antechamber from the wharves.

García de la Noceda House-Warehouse

Offices. Avenida 52, no. 2913–2915 on the corner with Calle 31 (Argüelles on the corner with D'Clouet)

The house-warehouse built by the Spanish merchant José García de la Noceda in 1881 near the port area is one of the finest of its kind on the island. Its owner, the classic poor emigrant who made his fortune in America, took great pains in constructing an eminent architectural version of his palace. Today it stands out due to its large scale and the severity of its neoclassical two-storey facade on which he placed a mirador in the centre topped by a dome as an observation point of trade in the bay. It has two well differentiated levels: the first floor used as a warehouse and profit-making area; and the second used as a residence and offices based on a traditional functional distribution dating from the 18th century in the ports of Cuba and the Caribbean in general. It was also known as Cacicedo Palace, the surname of one of its later owners.



Some of the highlights of this majestic building are its white marble staircase leading to the large upper rooms, decorated with murals on the walls and ceilings; its stained-glass windows with several colours and designs ranging from a simple rectangular fanlight to a semi-circular arch; and its iron railings. According to the historian Joaquín Weiss, this house-warehouse, out of all the residential urban constructions, is "the best in Cienfuegos of its kind (...) large with simple, strong shapes comparable with the best properties of its kind in the capital".

House owned by the Falla Bonet family

Municipal Headquarters of the Communist Party of Cuba. Avenida 56, 3311 between Calle 33 and 35 (San Carlos between Hourrutiner and Gazel)

In the early 20th century, a branch of the powerful Falla family, Spanish sugar-plantation owners and merchants, built a house in the compact part of the city along the persistent lines of Blanco Palace and García Noceda's House, but with a more residential function. Inside it has granite floors and hydraulic mosaics and one of the most



famous decorative elements are the stucco cherubs on the ceiling in the main room.

Paseo del Prado

Calle 37 between Avenida 40 (Campomanes) and Avenida 72.



From early on this wide boulevard became the thoroughfare between the town and its region. The foundational layout by De Clouet and the surveyor Famada included two tree-lined boulevards to the east and west of the urban centre as appeared in the 1798 design drawn by the Lemaur brothers. But due to its position in the peninsula, the town had to grow towards the east and the boulevard located in this direction, called Vives in honour of Cuba's governor at the time, Dionisio Vives, was the most useful and was widened to 40 yards (34 m). From then on it became the backbone of the settlement's expansion, supporting new streets and plots along its length. However, regulations stated that it was a broad thoroughfare, with compulsory porticos at the sides, and not a tree-lined boulevard with gardens and flower beds.

The pedestrian structure it has today was the initiative of residents between 1911 and 1913, funded by public collection and perhaps encouraged by the boulevard in Havana that it was named after. The popular Cienfuegos Prado has become the longest boulevard in Cuba of its type. Not only does it have trees, but also sculptures, benches and lamp posts and all the components needed to encourage pedestrian participation framed by an ensemble of extremely valuable architectural and social buildings. It also meant the former Plaza Mayor was no longer in a central position.

Important 20th-century buildings in the Paseo del Prado and the residence of Pedro Aragonés

Calle 37, no. 5805–5807–5809 between Avenida 58 and Avenida 60 (Paseo del Prado between Santa Cruz and Santa Elena), Calle 37, no. 4816–4818 between Avenida 48 and 50 (Paseo del Prado between Dorticós and Santa Clara) / Calle 37, no. 4213–4215 between Avenida 42 and Avenida 44 (Paseo del Prado between Cisneros and Zaldo)

Architecturally important residences several storeys high with upper balconies overlooking the boulevard were built in the Paseo del Prado in the first half of the 20th century. They stand out due to their profuse moulded cement decoration with plant motifs, decorated corbels and capitals, all with the most refined details. The heavy volume of stone and masonry walls of the previous century have made way for the lightness and transparency achieved with reinforced concrete. The external and internal decorative elements of these houses, the use of floral motifs, delicately made iron railings and frosted glass, are crucial and unique for the city as they lend great elegance to the most important linear and pedestrian thoroughfare in the city of Cienfuegos.



House of Lions

Calle 37, no. 5804–5806 between Avenida 58 and Avenida 60 (Paseo del Prado between Santa Cruz and Santa Elena)

Built in 1871 by José Antonio Capote it is known as the House of Lions because of the two large iron lion figures standing in its wide portico, brought from a villa in the city of Trinidad that belonged to the sugar-plantation owner Justo Germán Cantero, the author of the text of the famous lithographic album *Los Ingenios* (The Sugar Mills). This house was built on a wide raised terrace that isolates it from the street traffic and makes its Tuscan column portico feel like a monument. Its inner facade has high cast iron railings topped by cone-shaped overhangs, Andalusian traditional motifs, which, together with its lions and its high portico, are unusual in the rest of the city and have earned it public admiration. Declared a Local Monument in 1990.



The cemeteries

*Tomás Acea Cemetery. Avenida 5 de Septiembre no. 8302 between Calle 83 and 85, southeast of the city /
Reina Cemetery. Calle Villegas between Avenida 48 and Avenida 50. La Reina Neighbourhood*



The construction of cemeteries away from churches and outside the urban area began at the beginning of the 19th century in Cuba in a reaction to progress made in public hygiene and the fight against old customs. The new funeral constructions in Cuban cities became modern and complexes were opened in which the porticos, chapels and sculptural monuments linked artistic quality to moral sentiment and the social representation of family. Out of all the cities in Cuba, Cienfuegos is the only one that has two of the most valuable funerary architectural sites in the country, declared National Monuments, that show how taste developed from one century to another in this construction genre.

Reina cemetery, opened in 1839, was the most common type of complex where the pantheons and niches are compactly

enclosed within the perimeter and have a gateway, in this case a classic sober pediment. A century of exclusive use gathered together a collection of high quality marble sculptures and tombstones, such as the well-known Sleeping Beauty, and formed a complex that today stands out due to the integrity of its original structure. The General Cemetery, or Reina Cemetery, is unique in the country due to its main courtyard surrounded by three rows of vertical niches.

Part of the legacy of Nicolás Acea de los Ríos, a teacher and sugar-plantation owner linked to the Terry family by marriage and who died in 1904 leaving 300,000 pesos to charity, was set aside by his executors to build a new cemetery that would be named after his deceased son. The architect and engineer Pablo Donato Carbonell, who

was updating Cienfuegos architecture with his works at the time, was commissioned with the design. Completed in 1926, the construction is considered to have given Cienfuegos one of the best burial grounds in the country. Designed as a beautiful cemetery-garden, the only one of its kind in Cuba, it takes advantage of the rolling terrain to integrate the tombs into the surrounding landscape. The large entrance porticos echo the classical style, but with a new historic version in the city due to its strict adherence to Festus's Greek order. The cemetery has 17.6 hectares and is divided into sections by interior avenues. Each section contains a tree species that it is named after, The Pines, The Tamarinds, The Cypresses, and so on. It is a valuable example of the most modern US concepts of funerary facilities.

Valle Palace and Jagua Hotel

*Avenida o on the corner with Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) and
Avenida 2 between Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) and the coastline*



La Punta, or Punta Gorda, is a residential area in the south of the city. A place of great natural beauty, it affords a splendid panorama of the entire bay and the Escambray mountain range. The site of old indigenous legends recreated by Adrián del Valle, it attracted the construction of the first recreational villas in Cienfuegos at the end of the 19th century. One of them, located in the best position overlooking the sea, owned by the merchant Celestino Caces, was known as the Moor's Villa due to its Arab-Spanish style. It was purchased by Alejandro Suero Balbín who gave it as a wedding present to his daughter Amparo and his son-in-law, the Asturian Acisclo del Valle y Blanco, the owner of several plants. He took advantage of the exotic inspiration of the existing property and incorporated it into the majestic construction of a Moorish palace behind it designed by the architect and engineer Pablo Donato Carbonell and built by the Italian architect

Alfredo Colli with the master builder Suárez between 1913 and 1917.

The building progressed during World War I when sugar prices led to the boom years in the Cuban economy, a brief time to realise architectural dreams, such as Valle Palace, one of the most significant on the island. Although its facades and ground floor mostly remind us of Arab-Spanish architecture, the interiors are decorated with the most varied European styles, primitive Gothic, Imperial, Louis XVI and on the top floor, the least decorated area, the Venetian style predominates. A phrase taken from the Koran was repeated in relief on the plastered and painted walls of the main rooms: "Only God is God". The eclectic fantasy created an architecture suited to enjoying architecture as history, emulating film scenes. Materials and craftspeople were brought in from other countries. The materials—marble, alabaster, bronze, ceramics and glass—were imported from Spain, Italy and the United States, except for the fine Cuban hardwood. There are three minarets and an harbour on its flat roof. The perimeter iron railing, classified as Muslim, was considered a real work of craftsmanship. Its owner was not able to enjoy his fabulous palace for long as he died in Spain in 1919 and his descendants soon left to live on the peninsula.

In the 1950s, open to tourist investments, the residence took another turn. José López Vilaboy, the front man for Fulgencio Batista, established the Compañía de Fomento y Turismo de Cienfuegos, S.A. in partnership with Acisclo Valle's widow and heirs to build a motel in the gardens and a casino in the palace. The design was commissioned to the firm run by the architects Eduardo Cañas Abril and Nujim



Nepomechie, well known at the time for the construction of important projects such as Eugenio Leal's House in the Miramar Neighbourhood, where the mature reinforced concrete technique was combined with the artistic murals of Mario Carreño and Amelia Peláez. The hotel was opened on 31 December 1959 with 144 rooms and two suites over seven floors at a cost of two and a half million dollars. It is considered a valuable reminder of rationalism in Cuba. Every room has private balconies providing a vista point to enjoy the lush seascape, its bay, the Escambray mountains and the city of Cienfuegos. Its architecture contains pure, simple, straight-line solutions, since it was designed as an open complex with no barriers, in which its picturesque main oblong facade elegantly inflects in the centre at the height of the lift shaft, thus banishing all monotony. It has balconies whose balustrades are a series of bright colours, making it look pleasing to the eye.

Blue Palace and Chalcía Cacicedo House

*Palacio Azul Hotel. Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) on the corner with Avenida 12 /
Hostal Encanto, Green House. Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) between Avenida 0 and Avenida 2.
Punta Gorda Neighbourhood*

The villas in the Punta Gorda Neighbourhood adjoining the sea became permanent residences for some affluent families rather than summer homes as they were close to the city, yet far enough removed from the hustle and bustle of daily life in the centre. They transferred their residential models there, now detached houses surrounded by large gardens in a calm setting with privileged natural views. The Blue Palace, built in 1925 for the Menéndez Acebal family by the architect and civil engineer Federico Navarro, is one of these elegant examples. Considerable in size and surrounded by porticos and loggias, it has beautiful shutters and is topped by a mirador with an enamel dome on the flat roof. The Green House is a short distance away. This is another residence characterised by the use of colour, built around 1935 by Chalcía Cacicedo. It has large rooms and terraces with sea views and profuse decoration inside and also its own bathing area.



Cienfuegos Yacht Club

*Calle 37 between Avenida 8, Avenida 12
and the coastline*



Water sports clubs began to pop up in Cuba in the early 20th century. Similar to the yacht clubs in the United States and Britain, they were not just for this type of sailing, but also for rowing and swimming. In general, they operated as exclusive associations that also held social events and their buildings grouped together members of the local bourgeoisie. Cienfuegos Yacht Club, designed by the architect Pablo Donato Carbonell, was one of the first to erect its building on the island with an architectural quality similar to internationally famous casinos and sport centres. It was only comparable in the country at the time with the Vedado Tennis Club in Vedado in Havana. It is an elegantly decorated property on a large plot with space to achieve a beautiful perspective of its facade, and a balanced distribution with two side sections topped by picturesque towers. The flat roof was designed as a large observation deck. According to local legends, the [Marilope](#) episode happened here. The daughter of a Spanish colonist, she became a victim of pirates and lent her name to a marvellous yellow flower.

Wooden houses in Punta Gorda

Puyín House. Calle 35, no. 4 between Avenida o and the coastline, Villa Amparo / Educator's House. Calle 35, no. 26 between Avenida o and the coastline and Celestino Caces's House / "El Castillito" Guesthouse. Calle 35, no. 6 between Avenida o and the coastline. La Punta.



Cuban cities contain valuable examples of wooden architecture, sometimes with bungalow or balloon frame influences. Some of the best in Cienfuegos are grouped in

La Punta. For example, the Serafín Ros, Ramón Entensa and Celestino Cases houses, built in the 19th and 20th centuries by the master builder Domingo Ferreiro, preserve

their wooden structure and French tiled roofs and they stand out due to their profuse carpentry decoration with beautiful corbels, lambrequins and shutters.

The eclectic houses of Alejandro Suero Balbín

Avenida 52, no. 2706 and no. 2704, between Calle 27 and Calle 29 (Argüelles between San Luis and Santa Isabel)

Both adjoining excellent properties were built by the Italian architect and engineer Alfredo Fontana Giugni for Alejandro Suero Balbín in the first decades of the 20th century at the same time as the owner's son-in-law built Valle Palace. The two constructions are also linked by

their exceptional decoration and the wealth of materials used. Alejandro Suero's houses are profusely decorated and have differing facades with designs combining baroque adornments, human figures, lions and garlands. The interiors have ceilings exquisitely plastered with gypsum and decorated with frescoes alluding to French romanticism, marble floors and mosaics, beautifully decorated partitions and highly elaborate iron railings. The exceptional decoration of these properties, located in the centre of the city's uniform, rational layout conveys a message of diversity and creativity that turns them into landmarks of domestic architecture in Cienfuegos.



Cienfuegos Liceo

Roberto García Valdés Provincial Library, Calle 37, no. 5615 on the corner with Avenida 58 (Paseo del Prado on the corner with Santa Cruz).



Liceos dated from the 19th century and grouped together white families with more financial resources in the cities in the island's interior. In 1921 the architects Pablo Donato Carbonell Ferrer and the engineer Alfredo Colli completed the construction of this splendid property that stands out from all the other buildings on the Paseo del Prado due to its size and decoration. Although it isn't easy to define its neo style, it is attributed to the French Renaissance. Its distribution is typical of buildings of this type; large in scale, the main room is on a second level covered by a mansard ceiling decorated with gypsum moulding in the style of Louis XV. In the centre of the moulding the space opens for the city's shield, beautiful hanging lamps, wall lamps and art nouveau partitions form and divide other spaces that were previously used for bars and table games.

Nuestra Señora de Montserrat Jesuit School

Basic Secondary School D1. Avenida 54, Calle 45, Avenida 56 and Calle 47 (San Fernando, Cid, San Carlos and O'Donell)

Religious orders played an important role in education in Cuba in the 19th century, emulating secular schools. The Jesuits established a secondary school in Cienfuegos in 1884 and 1919 to educate male students from the centre of Cuba as borders. The Society of Jesus School still amazes us due to its large capacity, since it had five storeys, including the basement. The left wing was used temporarily as a church at the end of the century. It affords an impressive image of solid proportions and barely any adornment, designed to reflect the order's characteristics of discipline and strictness typical of this school's teaching system. Declared a Local Monument in 1990.



Cayo Loco Southern Naval District

Naval History Museum. Avenida 60 on the corner with Calle 23 (Santa Elena on the corner with Velazco)

Cayo Loco (Mad Key), previously known as Cayo Güije, the setting for the fabulous legend of the [Black Venus](#), who embodies the silent protest against slavery, is the closest to Cienfuegos in the Bay. It was owned by several colonists until it was purchased by the Colonial Navy at the end of the 19th century when Spanish rule ended. The coastguard service moved there in 1902. It was declared the Southern Naval District in 1935 and the main naval strategies of the central southern region of Cuba were developed and implemented in this area. It attained most historic significance as one of the main settings of the armed uprising of 5 September 1957. Since 1980 it has housed the Naval History Museum with large outdoor areas where authentic, original and unique exhibitions of interest showcase naval and nautical development in Cuba.



08

OUR HERITAGE HOTELS

La Unión Hotel

*Calle 31, no. 5401 on the corner with Avenida 54
(D'Clouet on the corner with San Fernando)*



In the second half of the 19th century, the port of Cienfuegos had overtaken Trinidad's as the sugar export port and it was an active meeting point for the island's southern cabotage shipping lines and commercial traffic in the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic. This commercial boom led to buildings offering accommodation. One of the oldest and largest hotels was La Unión, built on land that the Venezuelan merchant Tomás Terry y Adán

purchased from his brother-in-law Pedro Dorticós, a descendant of Jagua's first French colonists. In 1885, Natividad Terry Dorticós, resident in France, joined this land inherited from his parents to construct a three-storey building that is the current hotel, which he leased to Faustino Forbés. It soon became famous and received guests from Cuba and abroad who came for the quality of its services, its speciality French cuisine and for having electric light throughout its premises. The island's Captain General Arsenio Martínez Campos was staying there when he received notice that the Spanish army had been defeated on 15 December 1895 in the Bad Weather Battle. The following century, its guests included celebrities from a variety of professions and ranks, such as the world chess champion José Raúl Capablanca, the ballerina Anna Pavlova, and the Cuban president Tomás Estrada Palma.



San Carlos Hotel

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(San Carlos between Hourruitiner and Gazel)*

The construction of San Carlos Hotel was begun in 1921. Designed by the architect Alfredo Colli Franconetti, the architect Joaquín Carbonell Cabrera took over as manager of the project until it was completed in 1924. The street it is named after inherited an old legend from the times when it was one of the new town's borders where residents were haunted by a [ghostly caiman](#). In the end, it turned out to be a scoundrel disguising himself as a predator to rob the inhabitants of their birds, cattle, pigs and horses. Now it was the site of modernity in Cienfuegos where the new hotel was erected as a



six-storey property with a roof garden, imitating the style of US buildings that were going up in Havana at the time. However, this was quite a challenge far from the capital, since the new metal structures for this type of building were difficult to erect outside the sphere of the construction companies in Havana. It was the highest building in the central region of Cuba, considered the city's most outstanding vista point, and it had 80 rooms on its four accommodation levels. As a result, it was a visual focus of interest in the urban structure and a valuable example of civil and public architecture.

Valle Palace and Jagua Hotel

*Avenida 0 on the corner with Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés)
and Avenida 2 between Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) and the coastline.*



La Punta, or Punta Gorda, is a residential area in the south of the city. A place of great natural beauty, it affords a splendid panorama of the entire bay and the Escambray mountain range. The site of old indigenous legends, such as the one about Díaz, recreated by Adrián del Valle, it attracted the construction of the first recreational villas in Cienfuegos at the end of the 19th century. One of them, located in the best position overlooking the sea, owned by the merchant Celestino Caces, was known as the Moor's Villa due to its Arab-Spanish style. It was purchased by

Alejandro Suero Balbín who gave it as a wedding present to his daughter Amparo and his son-in-law, the Asturian Acisclo del Valle y Blanco, the owner of several plants. He took advantage of the exotic inspiration of the existing property and incorporated it into the majestic construction of a Moorish palace behind it designed by the architect and engineer Pablo Donato Carbonell and built by the Italian architect Alfredo Colli with the master builder Suárez between 1913 and 1917.

The building progressed during World War I when sugar prices led to the boom years in the Cuban economy, a brief time to realise architectural dreams, such as Valle Palace, one of the most significant on the island. Although its facades and ground floor mostly remind us of Arab-Spanish architecture, the interiors are decorated with the most varied European styles, primitive Gothic, Imperial, Louis XVI and on the top floor, the least decorated area, the Venetian style predominates. A phrase taken from the Koran was repeated in relief on the plastered and painted walls of the main rooms: "Only God is God". The eclectic fantasy created an architecture suited to enjoying architecture as history, emulating film scenes. Materials and craftspeople were brought in from other countries. The materials—marble, alabaster, bronze, ceramics and glass—were imported from Spain, Italy and the United States, except for the fine Cuban hardwood. There are three minarets and an arbour affording excellent views of the bay on its flat roof. The three towers, of different styles, also have a peculiar symbology: the right tower represents strength, the one in the middle, which slightly resembles an Indian mosque, symbolises religion and the left tower love. The perimeter iron railing, classified as Muslim, was considered a real work of craftsmanship. Its owner wasn't able to enjoy his fabulous palace for long since Del Valle died of a heart attack in 1919 on a fatal day when they informed him of an irreversible downward trend in sugar prices. His widow and eight children left for the peninsula never to return and the marvellous house was looked after by his Catalan servant María Cavadonga.

In the 1950s, open to tourist investments, the residence took another turn. José López Vilaboy, the front man for



Fulgencio Batista, established the Compañía de Fomento y Turismo de Cienfuegos, S.A. in partnership with Acisclo Valle's widow and heirs to build a motel in the gardens and a casino in the palace. The design was commissioned to the firm run by the architects Eduardo Cañas Abril and Nujim Nepomechie, well known at the time for the construction of important projects such as Eugenio Leal's House in the Miramar Neighbourhood, where the mature reinforced concrete technique was combined with the artistic murals of Mario Carreño and Amelia Peláez.

The Jagua Hotel, with 144 rooms and two suites over seven floors, built at a cost of two and a half million dollars, was opened at Christmas 1959 with a banquet for the members of the Cuban Lions Club as part of this organisation's national convention. It is considered a valuable reminder of rationalism in Cuba. Every room has private balconies providing a vista point to enjoy the lush seascape, its bay, the Escambray mountains and the city of Cienfuegos. Its architecture contains pure, simple, straight-line solutions, since it was designed as an open complex with no barriers, in which its picturesque main oblong facade elegantly inflects in the centre at the height of the lift shaft, thus banishing all monotony. It has balconies whose balustrades are a series of bright colours, making it look pleasing to the eye.

When the revolution triumphed, the initial idea of turning Valle Palace into a casino was ruled out and instead it became the Rolando Escardó School of Plastic Arts managed by the famous Cienfuegos sculptor Mateo Torriente.

Blue Palace and Chalía Cacicedo House

*Palacio Azul Hotel. Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) on the corner with Avenida 12 /
Hostal Encanto, Green House. Calle 37 (Pedro Antonio Aragonés) between Avenida 0 and Avenida 2.
Punta Gorda Neighbourhood*



The villas in the Punta Gorda Neighbourhood adjoining the sea became permanent residences for some affluent families rather than summer homes as they were close to the city, yet far enough removed from the hustle and bustle of daily life in the centre. They transferred their residential models there, now detached houses surrounded by large gardens in a calm setting with privileged natural views. The Blue Palace, built in 1925 for the Menéndez Acebal family by the architect and civil engineer Federico Navarro, is one of these elegant examples. Considerable in size and surrounded by porticos and loggias, it has beautiful shutters and is topped by a mirador with an enamel dome on the flat roof. The Green House is a short distance away. This is another residence characterised by the use of colour, built around 1935 by Chalía Cacicedo. It has large rooms and terraces with sea views and profuse decoration inside and also its own bathing area.



09

CIENFUEGOS ON THE MAP

Cayo Ocampo and the first mapping of the island of Cuba

In 1508, the Governor of Hispaniola, Nicolás de Ovando, ordered the frontiers of the New World to be expanded, and to that end sent an expedition each to Cuba and to Borinquén (present-day Puerto Rico). For the first expedition, he commissioned the Galician navigator Sebastián de Ocampo, with the mission of producing a full mapping of the coasts of Cuba to determine whether it was an island, as the indigenous people stated, or continental land, as Columbus had claimed, and exactly how long it was.

The island was mapped using two ships, and took eight months, beginning at Maisí and Baracoa, and covering the whole of the north coast: Ocampo headed for Moa and the Tánamo bay, and then on to Nipe. The Cape of Cuba visited by Columbus was identified, along with Bariay, Gibara and Puerto Padre, and not long after the Nuevitas bay came into view, Cayo Sabinal and the other keys, and the Sabana-Camagüey archipelago, continuing on to Punta de Hicacos, where Varadero now stands. After the open Matanzas bay, Ocampo saw Carenas port or Havana bay, where he stopped to

map it and repair his ships. Finally they reached Cape San Antonio, before heading south. Not long after setting sail, they identified Cabo Francés, to the south of the Cortés inlet, by the 84th meridian west, where the Admiral turned round in 1494 during his second journey to the New World, when he attempted to verify along the south coast the same thing that Sebastián de Ocampo was doing: seeing whether Cuba was an island or a continent. On that occasion, urgency and anxiety led him to state unequivocally that it was the Asian

continent, as he needed to present this news to the king and queen so as not to lose credibility and thus be able to continue his voyages.

The two ships then continued on to Jagua bay, which they explored, and where they moored in a small key in the bay, where they rested and replenished wood and water supplies, and which is still known as Ocampo. The navigator would inform the king of Spain that "...this port, which its inhabitants call Jagua, is one of the best and safest to be found in the world".

After following his route around the coast, his expedition reached the Gulf of Guacanayabo, and later the crew were delighted to see the mountainous landscape of the Sierra Maestra and the rocky cliffs of Maisí, by which Sebastián de Ocampo realised that they had sailed right the way round the island of Cuba, and that Columbus was mistaken. This paved the way for the conquest and colonisation of Cuba, and Cayo Ocampo, which can today be visited by boat from Cienfuegos, is an eye witness to that feat.



Benny Moré and Orquesta Aragón



The timeless song by Benny Moré has become a veritable hymn in Cienfuegos:

*When I came to Cienfuegos
and wished to see that city
As they call it “the Pearl”
and now I’ll tell you why.*

The chorus of Benny’s song says that “Cienfuegos is the city that I like the most”.

Moré, the most popular musician that the island has produced, was from the Cienfuegos town of Santa Isabel de las Lajas, and it was from there where this descendant of a Congo tribal king captured in the jungle and brought to Cuba as a slave emerged to triumph on the stages of Havana, Mexico and throughout the Americas, becoming known as the Wildman of Rhythm.

It is impossible to distil into a single short chronicle the musical trajectory of [Bartolomé Maximiliano Moré Gutiérrez](#), the eldest of 18 siblings of a humble Cuban family, who at the age of six built his first instrument from a board and a spool of thread, and who had to leave school at an early age to help his family. The time he spent early on in his career with the renowned trio Matamoros, his time in Mexico and his connection to the creator of mambo Dámaso Pérez Prado, with whom he recorded such memorable pieces as Guanabacoa, Locas por el Mambo, Viejo Cañengo, El suave, Que Cinturita, María Cristina, Pachito Eche and Dolor Carabalí, among other songs, and his unforgettable collaboration with the best bands of the era, such as the Bebo Valdés band, catapulted him to success, although his career really took off in 1953 when he formed his own big band, made up of legendary instrumentalists and with which he would revolutionise the musical panorama of the age.

His voice, his arrangements, his charisma and legendary repertoire, featuring **mambos** such as “Bonito y Sabroso” and “Así es la Humanidad”, the



sones “Que Bueno Baila Usted” and “Vertiente Camagüey”, timeless **guaguancós** and **rumbas** such as “Rumberos de Ayer”, the **boleros** “Dolor y Perdón”, “Mi Amor Fugaz” and “No te Atrevas”, as well as unforgettable **chachachas**, **guarachas** and **guajiras**, made Benny one of the all-time greats of Cuban music.

Also from Cienfuegos is the legendary Orquesta Aragón, a group belonging to the so-called French **charangas** and founded in 1939 by the double-bassist Orestes Aragón. The group became one of the most popular bands in Cuba in the 1950s. Their repertoire initially consisted of **danzones**, **boleros**, **guarachas** and other genres of Cuban music, but with the success of the **chachacha**, the [La Aragón](#) became the principal performer of this genre, taking it to its most refined level in terms of creativity and instrumentation.

Fall of El Inglesito



From the time of the first war of independence (1868-1878), the lands of Cienfuegos major wartime events and legendary battles, such as in 1876 near Yaguaramas, where the brigadier [Henry Reeve](#), known as “El Inglesito” or little Englishman due to his American origin, fell at the age of 26. Reeve became one of the most charismatic officers with the Mambí army, and his unique story forms part of the legend of the army that fought to liberate Cuba from Spain.

When barely a teenager, Reeve took part in his country’s War of Succession as a drummer in the Union Army. When he learned of the uprising in Cuba that had begun in La Demajagua, led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Reeve volunteered to travel to Cuba as an expeditionary. He arrived in Cuba in 1869, on board the Perrit steamer as part of an Expeditionary Force. The expedition was ambushed by the Spanish army while they were unloading supplies, and Reeve was taken prisoner, along with many others. The Spanish shot them all and left them unburied, assuming they were dead. Reeve had received four bullet wounds, but had enough strength to crawl away, and was found by Cuban pro-independence forces.

From that point on, he was known as Enrique, the American, and given the title of “El Inglesito” by Major General Ignacio Agramonte. Reeve rose rapidly under his command. In turn, Reeve gave Agramonte his nickname: “El Mayor”. Under the command of Agramonte, Reeve took part in a great many actions, including the rescue of

Brigadier Julio Sanguily in October 1871, where Agramonte, Reeve and another 34 horsemen defeated a Spanish troop of 120 men.

During a decisive action, Reeve rushed at an enemy artillery battery, raising the morale of the Cuban independence army, but receiving a most serious wound in his leg. For his actions, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier. Exposed to the harsh conditions of the wetlands and because of the wounds in his legs, the doctors advised him not to ride again, but Reeve persevered and was able to walk, though he had to be tied to his saddle in order to ride.

He was thus able to continue to lead the famous Camagüey cavalry corps until eventually falling in combat. Following the death of Agramonte in Jimaguayú on 11 May 1873, Reeve served under General Máximo Gómez in the legendary Camagüey Cavalry. Under his command, he took part in the failed invasion from the East to the West of Cuba. With the invasion at an impasse in the province of Matanzas in the summer of 1876, the Spanish wiped out the few soldiers in his escort. Unable to ride, Reeve put a bullet in his temple with his revolver so as not to be captured by the enemy.

As a trophy of war, his body was brought to Cienfuegos and put on display in the beautiful Reina cemetery, where he is thought to have been buried.

The Battle of Mal Tiempo

It was late 1895 and the third Cuban War of Independence was under way when the Battle of Mal Tiempo took place, one of the most important actions carried out by the Mambí forces in the invasion toward the west during the war against Spanish colonialism.

The Captain General of the island, Arsenio Martínez Campos, understood that the advance of the Liberating Army from the east was imminent, and in a desperate attempt to halt the push west he concentrated a large number of troops in the Cruces area. In around three hours the Mal Tiempo battle had come to an end, with great success for the Cuban forces. The action was defined by one of the most significant machete charges led by the troops of Maceo at the front, General Máximo Gómez in the middle, following by Serafín Sánchez and, bringing up the rear, Brigadier Luis de Feria.

Mal Tiempo also served to dismantle the myth that the Spanish troops were unbeatable, and to reveal, once again, the irrevocable decision made by Cubans to achieve independence for Cuba at any price. The failure of the battle for the Spanish demonstrated the negative influence of conscription, resulting in the lack of a common ideal.



The Mal Tiempo disaster handed the pro-independence Cubans copious spoils of war, consisting of 150 Mauser rifles, 60 Remingtons, six boxes of munitions, officers' and soldiers' horses, mules, equipment, medical supplies, and the flag and documentation from the Archive, which enabled them to identify the vanquished column. The Liberating Army killed around 200 soldiers from the Spanish army in the battle. The pro-independence forces, however, reported only four deaths and four wounded.

The battle marked the end of the first stage of the invasion, leading to a new strategy and tactic by those fighting for

independence. It was also hugely significant politically, as at the national level it ratified the decision and indicated a real possibility of advancing to the West. Locally, it strengthened the pro-independence position in the area, and made the people living in the area feel the effects of the Spanish Army's policy of harassment even more.

Martínez Campos was staying at La Unión de Cienfuegos hotel when he heard about the battle, and rode off at breakneck speed to try to stop the advance of the Mambí troops.



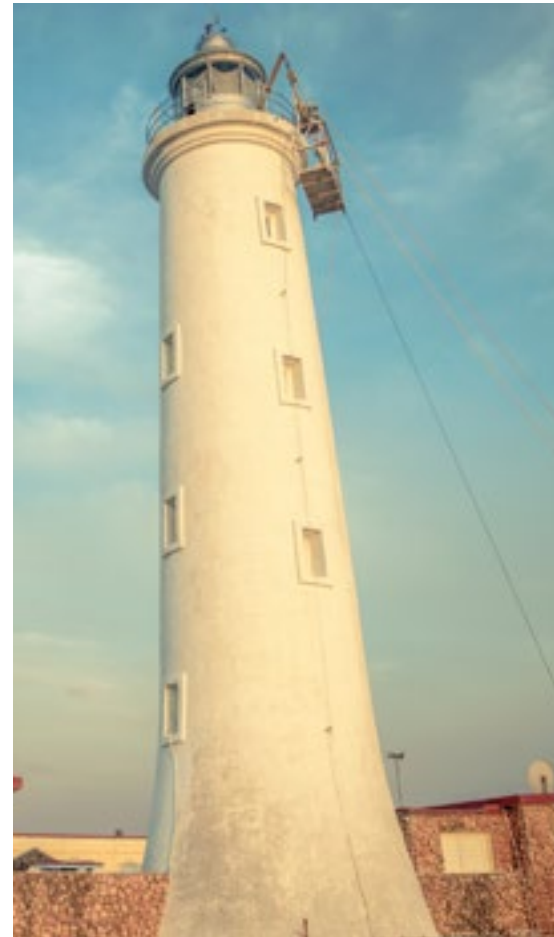
The Cienfuegos lighthouse

Back in 1846, with the amount of commercial traffic going in and out of the port, there was clearly a need to install a lighthouse at the entrance to the channel into the bay to ensure safe access to Cienfuegos port. On 16 July of the same year traders addressed the Spanish authorities in the following terms: “Having recognised the suitability of placing a beacon at the entrance to this bay... and given the impossibility that the Royal Development Board finds itself in due to its many commitments, to provide funds for it, we are willing to fund the amount by subscription for the necessary lamp, and to charge the boats arriving at our consignment the tax amount believed to be fair to subsidise the costs of the keeper and maintenance.”

The best site for it to be built was studied, and Punta de los Colorados was chosen, on the windward side of the port entrance, both as the point most out at sea, and for the quality of the land, and located at 22°02.1 latitude north and 80°26.5 longitude west. The task of carrying out the project was given to the lieutenant colonel of engineers Francisco de Albear, who by February had two projects ready, and eventually deciding on the one that placed the lighthouse keeper’s room inside the tower, thus helping in the lighthouse’s defence against attacks by any possible assailants.

Work began in August 1848, beginning with building the track leading up to the site, using prisoners and negro slaves to provide the labour. Due to the unhealthy conditions on the site, at the end of the project eight people were reported to have died during the construction works.

The tower was completed on 5 March 1849. A French lighting system using the Fresnel model was installed, and was ready for use on 1 March 1851. In accordance with the practice of naming lighthouses after captains general or other high-level representatives of the Crown in the island, and the Maisí lighthouse having been named after the Captain General of Cuba,



José de la Concha, it was decided for the Cienfuegos lighthouse to be known as Villanueva, in recognition of the Creole Claudio Martínez de Pinillos, Count of Villanueva, Superintendent of the Treasury of Cuba, who distinguished himself by securing completely free trade for Cuba with the rest of the world, and was respected for his financial skills and personal integrity.

The lighthouse was first lit on 19 March 1851. In practice it became clear that the space for the tower provided in the initial project was insufficient to accommodate the lighthouse keepers and their families, so on 3 June 1861 the Jurisdictional Development Board of Cienfuegos requested housing be built, which took until 1867 to complete. The light from the lighthouse was used by Mambí expeditions during the war against Spanish colonialism, as they disembarked nearby, one of these was the expedition by Miguel Betancourt, in the steamer Dauntless, which arrived on 13 October 1896 at the mouth of the San Juan river, and that of Fernando Méndez, who disembarked from the steamer Sommers Smith at the mouth of the Arimao river on 15 September 1897. During the Spanish-American War in Cuba, one of the first actions by the American fleet was to cut the Western Union submarine telegraphy cable on 11 May 1898, which entered at the same Punta de los Colorados. The following day, the lighthouse was bombarded by the Mablehead and Winslow ships, led by the commander W.H.H. Southerland, which led to the lighthouse being completely destroyed.

At the end of the war, the Americans weighed up the need to replace the destroyed lighthouse, and installed a provisional sixth-order light, hung from a wooden mast, but this proved insufficient, as it did not ensure access to Cienfuegos bay, which led the American authorities to build a new lighthouse on the same spot, with a focal height of 19.65 metres, installing a fourth-order lens system. It was opened in 1901, using a constant level petroleum lamp, with regular flashes every 5 seconds and visible from a distance of 15 miles, with a total cost of 25,183.67 pesos. In March 1952 the lighting system was replaced by a lamp using a incandescent petroleum vapour installation. After the triumph of the Revolution, on 26 June 1969, it was electrified and remodelled, with new housing built in 1970 for the lighthouse keepers. The lighthouse now has a visible reach of 38 nautical miles and also has a radio beacon.

The nation councils of Cienfuegos

During the period of slavery in the Caribbean, it was customary for the white masters to separate Africans from the same nations, in order to make communication between them harder. However, from the first century of Spanish colonisation and African slavery in Cuba, “nation councils” were formed. These councils were organisations of slaves, or former slaves, who would come together according to their ethnic or national origins. These brotherhoods or societies, which came to be known as councils, were allowed by the Spanish in Latin America, and consisted of a religious board or association. Their origin dates back to Seville in the 14th century, and since then these councils were used by the authorities, not only to promote the Catholic religion, but also to control the diverse ethnic and social groups in the community. The first council for which there are records in Cuba was the Changó council, which was formed in 1568.

Membership of these nation councils was typically diverse in social and economic terms. The unifying factor was that they had all been slaves at some point, which led them to fight for the emancipation of other slaves. The councils also raised money for times of need (hunger, sickness, death). It also gave slaves the chance to consult their own deities and ancestors, and uphold their African idiosyncrasy in a new setting – their music, dance, song and prayers, to the beat of their drums.



As these African organisations played their instruments and danced their traditional dances, because of the complaints by neighbours of the “unpleasant noises” coming from the drums, most councils were held in the outskirts of town, which meant they were less supervised and therefore enjoyed greater autonomy. As the 19th century progressed, and due to constant slave revolts, regulations became increasingly strict, until the councils were completely banned in 1888.

At first, the nation councils were for slaves who had been born in Africa and had the same African origin,

but over time councils were formed with several nations and even with Creole slaves. With the onset of the 20th century, the councils turned into cultural, political and mutual-aid societies; it was through these councils that Afro-Cubans defended their rights in the first half of the 20th century. Despite the fact that in their beginnings they were thought of as a strategy for controlling slaves, they also represented a weapon of cultural resistance and at the same time helped bring about the cross-cultural development of Cuban society.

In the town of Palmira, located 12 kilometres north of Cienfuegos, several councils which have been preserved in good condition can be visited, such as El Cristo, San Roque, San Antonio, Santa Teresa and Santa Bárbara, and where a range of religious objects, images and musical instruments made by slaves are kept. Cienfuegos is home to the Cabildo de Santa Bárbara, which contains the *batá* drums of María del Carmen Soler, a descendant of slaves, and who is amalgamated with the *orisha* Shango. Also preserved is the staff of power of Basilia Acea, daughter of Elegua and founder of this council, and one of the oldest images in existence of the *orisha* Yewa.

10

TRADITIONS & LEGENDS OF CIENFUEGOS

OUR TRADITIONS & LEGENDS

To understand the soul of a people, it is as necessary to research the facts and events, institutions and monuments as it is to study their myths, legends, traditions, fables, popular songs, and so on. In these lies the infancy of a people, their primitive poetry, the source of their sensibility, the origin of their beliefs and the seed of their future aspirations.

This service contains legends and traditions of Cienfuegos collected and published in 1919 by the researchers Pedro Modesto and Adrián del Valle. They belong to three separate eras. The first is that of the Ciboney people of Jagua in the time before Columbus. Some of them are based on Indian mythology, are highly original, not lacking in poetry and, like all mythologies, represent a major intellectual effort by primitive men in their attempt to explain the mystery of life, something not yet with all our great science and profound philosophy.

The second era is that of the discovery and colonisation of Cuba, and the third relates to the period around the founding and early years of Fernandina de Jagua, which went on to become the modern, progressive city of Cienfuegos.

AZURINA

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

Several years had passed from when Joseph Díaz had settled in Jagua. The sun had tanned and baked his face, and at the same time whitened his hair, but he was always in contact with mother nature, a stranger to the anxieties, hardships and troubles that civilisation brings, enjoying strength, good health and joy, always willing to help the Ciboney people with his efforts and advice, and earning the love and respect of the locals.

We have insinuated that Díaz had dealings with the pirates who frequented that coastline, and we can add that they were not sinful dealings, as Díaz was not involved in their misdeeds, limiting his dealings to agreements that he could not avoid, under the threat of turning them into powerful enemies.

One day, he received a visit to his modest shack by a famous pirate, whose name the tradition does not record. He was with a beautiful woman, with a sickly appearance, and whose shape suggested that it would not be long before she became a mother.

“José Díaz,” said the pirate, “you are a good and honourable man, in whom a scoundrel such as myself can trust. I have come to ask a favour of you, for which I will give you whatever you ask.”

“I put no price on my favours,” he simply replied.

“But I know how to pay for them, so I will not have to be grateful for them. I am going to leave this woman in your home and in your care.”

“Your daughter?” asked Díaz.

“No.”

“Your wife, perhaps.”

“It should be of no concern what she is to me. It is enough for you to know that I have an interest in her, and above all, for the being that she carries in her belly. Care for her well, as she has lost all reason, and when she gives birth, take the child under your protection and act as his father.”

Díaz gave his promise, and, sure that he would keep his word, the pirate left, leaving in the shack along with the young woman a good number of chests and lockers, which he made his sailors bring, and which contained beautiful gowns, rich jewels, fragrant resins and perfumed roots, that would appeal to the most coquettish and capricious woman. However, not of it seemed to interest Estrella (for that was her name), who remained still, mute, unresponsive to questions and requests, her gaze distant, as though lost in a void. Only occasionally would her eyes take on a pained expression, and her colourless lips would move, pronouncing odd words that had no connection and made no sense. Fleeting hallucinations would leave her prostrate, her entire body lightly trembling.

Who was this woman? What terrible mystery did her life hide? There was no way of knowing. There was nothing that she could say, and nothing that the pirate had revealed. She could have been a prisoner, violently held captive by the pirate, driven to madness following a great tragedy. Díaz had hoped to learn the truth from the mouth of the young woman herself, on whom he bestowed the most attentive care and attention. Unfortunately, although her health did improve somewhat, her mind did not recover, and when a few months later she gave birth, she did not survive, taking the mystery of her life with her to the grave. The sweet being who she left in the world was a beautiful girl, who Díaz baptised with the name of Azurina.

AYCAYIA

*(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)*

Of the seven beautiful dancers and singers that the cacique had in his court, six perished in the shipwreck of the dugout canoe; the one who escaped death (either due to taking more time over her headdress, or because she had been previously warned by the behique who felt a special predilection for her) was called Aycayia and of the seven was the most beautiful, the most graceful dancer and the singer with the sweetest and most melodious voice. It is no surprise, then, that she alone continued to disturb the peace of the flock, making men abandon their work, taking them away from fulfilling their duties as warriors and leading to discord in their homes.

Once again, the cacique, the elders and the behiques convened, and for a second time turned to the almighty Cemí, who spoke to them as follows:

“Aycayia is the embodiment of sin, the sin of beauty, art and love. She provides men with pleasure, but she makes them her slaves, robbing them of their free will. And her diabolical strength lies in the fact that, while satisfying all, she gives herself to no one. Virgin she remains, and virgin she will die. If you wish to live in peace, tear her from your bosom.”

The advice of the Cemí was followed. Aycayia, condemned to live in isolation in the company of an old woman called Guanayoa, was taken to a solitary place known today as Punta Majagua. Unfortunately, the situation did not improve for her. Such was the power of the beautiful dancer over men, that every day the Ciboney men would go to Punta Majagua, leaving their work and their homes, with the sole purpose of seeing Aycayia perform her marvellous dances, in which she displayed prodigious skill and dexterity, and to hear her sweet, caressing voice.

As was only natural, they all competed in giving her gifts,

taking her fruit, feathers, shells, sheets of gold and other trinkets of the kind that would flatter feminine vanity; and to all of it she smiled and from all of them she accepted their gifts, without any one of them able to boast of being favoured above any of the others.

The poor Indian women of Jagua felt abandoned, the wives by their husbands, the damsels by their beaux, who only had eyes and ears for the incomparable Aycayia. They turned to the cacique, who turned the matter over to the head behique, who in vain tried to make the flock return to the fold. The banished beauty, however, was equal to all the threats and interests.

The behique then resorted to the supreme infallible method: for a third time, he consulted the Cemí of the goddess Jagua, who gave him a few small black seeds, together with the following instructions:

“These seeds are an amulet against being forgotten and infidelity. Give them to the women, telling them to sow them in their gardens. When they bloom, their worries and distress will cease, and they will once again enjoy the attentions of their fiancés and husbands.”

The seeds, planted with solicitous care by the women, led to the tree known today as the Majagua or Demajagua, meaning the Mother Jagua, the leaves, flowers and wood of which have since then been considered amulets or prevention against marital infidelity.

The trees grew, and as their first flowers bloomed, a violent hurricane came, which swept the barbacoa or upper house where Aycayia and her elderly companion lived into the sea. The fury of the waves then dragged the two women into the water. The young woman was transformed into a water nymph or siren, and the old woman into a turtle, thus brining to an end the ill-fated and overwhelming power that the beautiful, peerless Aycayia had over the Ciboney men of Jagua.

Tradition gives us more than one interpretation of the role played by Aycayia in the sea. Some see her as a solitary water nymph, roaming Jagua Bay or out at sea, blowing into a huge pearly shell from a sea snail of the Antilles seas, the coarse sound from which is mistaken for the sound made by Caorao, the storm god. Others, meanwhile, believe that she rides on Guanayoa, transformed into a huge, revolting turtle, but also blowing into the sea snail shell, condemned for eternity to roam the rough seas, purging the sin of having been a beauty, a seductress and a virgin on land.

THE CAIMAN

*(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)*

The caiman is an animal that the conquistadores made genuinely American, but not for its repulsive features nor for its far from recommendable feats does it honour the great and magnificent continent discovered by Columbus.

According to the zoological classification, the caiman is a reptile in the saurian or lizard group, and appears in the sub-class of hydrosaurs, order of Crocodilia, sub-order of procelids, family of Alligatoridae.

If not in real life, readers will have seen a caiman at least in drawings or paintings, so we feel there is no need for a description here. If the reader is from Cienfuegos and feels a burning curiosity, that can be easily satisfied by taking a stroll around the nearby Zapata swamp, home to so many of our crocodiles (described incorrectly as caimans), those wide-mouthed carnivores with the long tail and short legs, and as heavy on land as they are light and swift in the water.

The caiman is widespread throughout America, except in the cold regions. Columbus saw one for the first time in the Chagres river, in 1502. Chroniclers of the conquest describe it accurately. Oviedo called them a lizard or dragon, and considers them to be very different to the crocodile. Herrera thought that they had no tongue and made a distinction between green and brown specimens, claiming the former to be larger and fiercer. He explains that they lay their eggs on the beach and cover them over with sand, which combined with the heat of the sun acts as an incubator for their eggs. The Indians would go in search of these eggs, which they relished. To hunt crocodiles, they used a stick sharpened to a point at the ends, tied with a thick rope in the middle. They would swim out looking for

one, and when it opened its mouth, they would jam the stick in vertically. They would then head straight for shore, pulling on the rope, which they would tie around a tree and haul in until the crocodile was out of the water, at which point they would beat it to death. On other occasions they would drive the two-ended stick through the body of a hutia (a type of rodent), which they would then leave on the shore. The crocodile would come out of the water to take the animal in its mouth, but would end up with its jaws jammed open by the stick, leaving it at the mercy of the Indians, who would attack it and kill it.

At the time of the conquest of Cuba by Diego Velásquez, in 1511, the Spaniards only saw these reptiles in the Cauto river and its tributaries. No records have survived from the time of the conquest regarding the existence of these animals in other places, but they were thought to be abundant in number in Jagua, which is renowned for its caimans.

In the early years after Fernandina de Jagua was founded, from 1819 until well into the 1830s, landowners and neighbours living next to the areas where the town was expanding, and particularly those living in the south east, which consisted more or less of the area occupied today by Calle de San Carlos to the north and Calle de Vives to the west, were the victims of the actions of a caiman that had its nest lair in the stream that turned into a ditch and which is now Calle de Dorticós.

With agonising regularity, the poor neighbours would see their birds, cattle, pigs and horses disappear. At first they thought it was people up to no good, moving in the dark at night to take what wasn't theirs. They observed, however,

THE CAIMAN

*(From the book:
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Valle, 1919.)*

that the birds or livestock that slept fenced off or under a roof were not disappearing, and they deduced that the thief wasn't necessarily a man, who would have found it easy enough to take animals that were fenced in.

Realising that there was a huge beast in the area, they deduced that this could be the only perpetrator of these nocturnal goings on to satiate its voracious appetite. They took certain precautions, but with no real outcome. The only effective preventive method was to fence in the animals, but not everyone in the area was in a position to do so, quite apart from the trouble and loss of time that it involved. Having come together to discuss matters of such vital importance, they agreed that the quickest and simplest way was to discover the criminal and give it what for. So one night, the neighbours most affected by the issue, led by Monsieur Bonón, set out to lie in wait, and it wasn't before long that they heard the sound of twigs being broken, clumsy steps of someone approaching, and from among the shadows they thought they saw the huge jaws of the beast and heard its teeth gnashing as it crunched the bones of its latest victim.

As soon as he saw it, Monsieur Bonón, who was the only one armed with an old flintlock rifle, summoning up all his courage and to the admiration of his neighbours, readied himself to carry out the heroic act that would free the nascent colony of such a troublesome and dangerous enemy. He raised his weapon, aimed without trembling, cocked the gun and readied himself to pull the trigger, but – a miracle! At the sound of the gun cocking, the animal turned as fast as it could, and realising that it was about

to be shot at point blank, let out a perfectly human cry:

“Don't shoot, Monsieur, I'm your friend!”

Terrorised by the unexpected, diabolical, supernatural notion of a talking caiman, the Frenchman's colleagues fled in a stampede, each one scrambling to get away as fast as they could, not stopping until reaching their homes and ensuring the door was locked tight.

Bonón, who did not scare easily, and was not given to believe in diabolical arts, must have realised that the crocodile was not real, and that under its tough skin had to be hiding someone of flesh and blood, someone known to him, such that, lowering his weapon, he simply replied:

“I know who you are, caiman...”.

The strange event must have intrigued the hardworking, peaceful colonists for quite some time, without them ever really knowing if it was indeed a real talking caiman that spoke like a man, or a local who passed himself off as one, to take what did not belong to him without being caught.

Given the time passed, we are in no position to clarify the matter. However, what we can state is that, thanks to the efforts of Luis Juan Lorenzo and the fine work of José Capote, the caiman did not bother the locals again. Granted, every now and then, before the neighbourhood began to expand, the occasional bird or animal would go missing, but such acts, so gossipers claimed, were carried out by caimans who were passing by, looking to take what did not belong to them.

THE CURSED INDIAN

*(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)*

There once lived a beautiful Indian woman called lasiga. She was the legitimate wife of a hardworking Ciboney man called Maitio. The two lived in joyous peace and harmony, only occasionally perturbed by the light clouds that would sometimes cast a shadow over their domestic bliss. While he would leave home to go out and hunt and fish, she would prepare the food, look after the crops, mend nets and traps, and do all that a dutiful wife should do.

lasiga was a woman with a fiery, passionate temperament. She loved her husband, but not so much that she had eyes only for him. And so it was that, the first time she saw Gaguiano, a handsome Ciboney man who was keen on plucking the fruit from the gardens of others, she felt such a burning passion that, forgetting about naive Maitio, she gave herself to him, enjoying with abandon the pleasures of forbidden love.

Many afternoons, Maitio would come home to notice his wife was not at home, who upon her return would apologise, saying that she had gone to offer pond-apples to her deceased ancestors, when the truth was that she was returning from her illicit escapades.

Everything must come to an end in this world, and this was true of Maitio's trust. On the way home one afternoon, cruel suspicion gnawed at his innocent soul. Upon finding the home empty, he did not simply wait patiently. He asked his neighbours about lasiga, who told him that they had seen

her pass with a tray of pond-apples, a sure sign that she was going to visit her ancestors. This did not put Maitio at ease. He headed to the shore and set off in his canoe, heading for where lasiga's family were buried. From afar he saw, on the beach, a couple locked in the eternal embrace. His heart skipped a beat. He was afraid that his suspicion had become reality. He doubled his efforts with his paddle and managed to reach shore without being seen. He moved forward with great caution, before leaping out in front of the surprised lovers, who were none other than lasiga and Gaguiano.

Maitio watched as his rival, a coward, ran away, and from his wife's throat their rose a cry of anguish. His face twisted with pain, Maitio bent down to lasiga and, his voice hoarse, said: "May you be cursed a thousand times, treacherous woman. May Mabuya punish your infidelity, condemning you to wander coastlines for eternity, without any hope of rest or compassion."

At that moment, the unfaithful lasiga was transformed into a sea monster, who on certain afternoons appears, mute, sorrowful and supplicant, to solitary fishermen, who in their rowboat, canoe or craft make their living from the sea.

That, at least, is how the legend goes. Today there are still those who believe the origin of the tradition is true, and those who suppose it is the manatee that can be seen in the waters of the Jucaral, or an enormous sea turtle or hawksbill that finds its way into Jagua bay.

THE BLUE LADY

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

Jagua Castle

The seas of the Antilles were infested with pirates, who showed a particular predilection for the coasts of Cuba. Not content with attacking tall ships and boats dealing in coastal trade, they would try their luck at raiding the island’s mainland to sack the haciendas and villages, their daring even leading them, in the early colonial period, to raiding Havana, Santiago de Cuba and other large towns.

The era and the defencelessness of the island contributed to these outrages. The job of a sea bandit paid well, and the dangers were not so bad as to act as a deterrent. Spain did not have enough ships to actively go after pirates, who in turn had good dens on a range of islands and keys.

The Jagua port was a regular haunt for Cayman pirates. The size of the bay, at 56 square miles, and its particular nature, made it a favoured spot for visits, which were anything but pleasant for those living there. Pirates could find their way into the bay undetected and remain hidden in the countless inlets for as long as they wished. With strength in numbers and in weaponry, they would embark on raids in the nearby areas, robbing and sacking shacks and estates, and taking settlers hostage when they fell into their hands, and would not let them go without a sometimes major rescue mission.

To prevent these dangerous raids, in 1682 there were intentions to fortify Jagua port, but this did not happen until 1742, when “Castillo de Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles” or Castle of Our Lady of Angels was built on the western part of the entrance to the bay. It is known today simply as “Castillo de Jagua”. Its construction was overseen by the military engineer José Tantete, and work did not finish until 1745. The castle was equipped with ten cannons of varying calibres, as this was deemed sufficient to fend

off pirate ships. But they didn’t consider that pirates also had small boats that could enter the huge bay using one of the mouths of Arimao, a river that has two branches, one flowing into the sea and the other, known as the Derramadero de las Auras, feeding into Guanaroca Lagoon, which is linked to the bay by an estuary. And so, despite the fortress and its cannons, the daring pirates continued to get up to their old tricks in the bay without running any major risks. To stop them from getting in, a palisade had to be built – traces of which can still be seen today, covering the Derramadero de las Auras. This finally freed the bay from regular and inconvenient pirate visits.

In its time, the castle was said to be a good one, and was third in importance in Cuba after Castillo del Morro in Havana and the castle in Santiago de Cuba. Today, the three castles are simply historical monuments.

Talking of history, before getting into the legend, it is worth noting that the first Commander of Jagua Castle was Juan Castillo Cabeza de Vaca. It isn’t known if he was a descendant of the famous explorer and conqueror Cabeza de Vaca, but it is known that his wife, Leonor de Cárdenas, was buried in the castle chapel, as was, ten years later, the first chaplain of the castle, the presbyter Martín Olivera. As well as a soldier, Castilla was a businessman with impressive initiative. He was instrumental in opening the first sugar factory in Jagua, which he set up on land of the Caunao hacienda, of which he was joint owner, located a league away from the bay. He named the factory “Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria” (Our Lady of Candelaria). Over the years it was eventually inherited by Antonia Guerrero. She was the wife of Agustín Santa Cruz, who donated the lands on which the city of Cienfuegos now stands.

And, taking history, greedy and vexatious as it is, by the hand, let us return to the realm of legend, full of deceptive illusions, but always pleasing and entertaining.

Although built relatively recently, Jagua Castle has its own stories and legends, which have their origin in the late-night gatherings of old neighbours from the area, and which were faithfully passed down from one generation to the next. According to one of these traditions, in the years shortly after Jagua Castle was built, in the small hours of the night, when the garrison was resting and the sentinels were dozing, unable to stay awake; when all was quiet in the neighbouring house of sailors and fishermen; when the deepest calm and solitude reined, only disturbed by the monotone rhythm of the waves, and moon on high shone down splendidly, wrapping the smooth surface of the sea and the abrupt contours of the land in its soft glow, when a large bird from unknown climes with white

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plumage flew into sight, heading for the castle tracing large spirals in the air and cawing sharply. As though answering a call from the mysterious bird, from the castle chapel there came forth, or rather, coming out of and through the walls, there appeared a phantom or shadow of a woman, tall, elegant, dressed in blue brocade and adorned with gemstones, pearls and emeralds, and covered from head to toe in a subtle, transparent veil that floated in the air. And having passed through the castle walls and ramparts of the castle, she suddenly disappeared, vanishing into thin air.

This ghoulish vision happened again over several nights, much to the understandable terror of the soldiers garrisoned at the castle, all hardened veterans who had fought on many different occasions and who could in no way be described as cowards; however, these men dared not oppose the mysterious apparition, and out of fear they were reluctant to keep watch at night as they were supposed to.

In the castle there was a young sub-lieutenant, who had recently arrived, arrogant and very sure that he did not believe in ghosts or apparitions from beyond the grave, which he dismissed as feverish or wild imaginings. The sub-lieutenant laughed heartily at the soldiers' fears and to prove to them how unfounded they were, he arranged to stand in for the sentinel one night. The soldiers retired to their dorms, leaving the young sub-lieutenant strolling, calm and collected, on the castle's upper walkway, with no weapon other than his sword.

It was a beautiful night. The stars shone in the firmament, paler than usual due to the glow of the moon. The calm sea sweetly whispered the eternal song of its waves. Not the

slightest noise could be heard on land. The atmosphere was one of calm and seclusion. To while away the monotony, the fearless sub-lieutenant strolled and thought about his wife, away in a distant land.

Suddenly he heard a piercing cawing noise and the beating of wings. At that precise moment, the castle's clock struck the first chime indicating 12 o'clock. The sub-lieutenant lifted his head and saw the strange bird with white plumage flying in large circles above the castle. And from the walls of the chapel, he saw the mysterious apparition that the soldiers had named the Blue Lady, due to the colour of her dress, move toward him.

The sub-lieutenant felt his heart skip a beat, but using his iron will he was able to calm his nerves, and strode out to meet the ghost.

What happened between the Blue Lady and the sub-lieutenant? We have never found out.

The most crucial part of the legend remains a mystery. What we can say, to satisfy the reader's natural curiosity, is that the morning after that fateful night, the soldiers found their sub-lieutenant on the ground, unconscious, and next to him, a skull, a fine blue cloak and his sword, broken in two.

Don Gonzalo, which was the young soldier's name, soon came round, but had lost his mind, and had to be locked away in an asylum. In his madness, he could always see a ghost, which he would attack in vain, as at the first attempt it would vanish into thin air, only to reappear shortly after.

With regard to the identity of the supposed or real ghost of the Blue Lady, the legend guards a prudent silence.

We don't know if the tradition has its origin in the punishment of a lady who lived as a recluse between those walls, with tropical fantasy adding splashes of supernatural colour to her memory, or if she is the poetic creation of a story embellished over the years, together with the tales told at night around the fire or on the beach.

And it is still a commonly held superstition that the Blue Lady makes her apparitions, walking undaunted on the ramparts of what is today an abandoned and almost demolished fortress. In the first rays of dawn, she rises into the air and, with a plaintive cry, disappears into the Caletón woodland.

MARILOPE

*(From the book:
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Valle, 1919.)*

Further north of the shack where tradition has it the family of Joseph Díaz lived, in the area of Revienta Cordeles, there stands a cement kiosk, built by the benevolent and charitable lady from Cienfuegos who loves her birthplace, Ms Teresa Rabassa, wife of the renowned businessman and banker Mr José Ferrer.

The kiosk is a pious reminder. It indicates the exact place where the sacrifice of Mari-Lope took place.

Who was Mari-Lope, you say?

Imagine, dear reader, a sweet and beautiful mixed-race girl, half Spanish and half Indian, who had inherited the Caucasian features of her father, and from her mother, her golden skin tone, the blackness of her hair and eyes, her naïve gaze and simple naturalness. She was lively and joyful, a lover of flowers and passionate about singing. With the same affection that she applied to growing wild flowers, she cared for the doves and birds she had lovingly tamed. Nobody sang religious areíto songs with more devotion than her, nor the songs of war with greater passion, nor the stories of love between the Ciboney people and pirates with more sweetness. She smiled at everyone with naïve purity, looked down on no one, whatever their status in life, but also showed no special predilection for anyone other than her parents.

Educated by a deeply pious father, who had given her a healthy mystical love for the divine. Her enlightened spirit was reflected in the heavenly bodies; her soul was always floating among the clouds and reflecting glory, and her burning desire was to go to the heavenly paradise offered by Christ and his followers.

Such was Mari-Lope, the sweet and beautiful damsel.

It goes without saying that all the young Ciboney men admired and pursued her, and there was always one of them to be found around her shack, which stood next the land where the Yacht Club is now being built. She, chaste and pure, devoted to her flowers and her winged creatures, distributed the treasures of her love between her parents and God.

As in the case of Azurina, it came about that a freeboot ship sailed into Jagua bay, looking for repairs. It was captained by Jean the Fearless, a ferocious pirate with an evil heart and worse instincts, still a young and arrogant figure. His tanned face was disfigured by the hardness of his gaze and the huge scar across his left cheek. Upon seeing Mari-Lope, he developed a burning passion for her, and felt the desire to possess her, but however many times he approached to talk to her of love, the same number of times was he politely turned down. Tenacious and stubborn, the pirate did not admit defeat, telling her that, if not through charm then through force would he secure what he wanted.

One afternoon he saw her walking along the empty beach. Cautiously, he approached.

“Well, Mari-Lope,” he said, “do you persist in spurning my love?”

“I have promised not to be of any man; I belong to God.”

Jean was a believer, in his own way, but at that moment he felt the sting of jealousy over the Supreme Being, who was fighting him for the woman he adored.

“Mari,” he argued, “the love of God cannot prevent you from belonging to me.”

“It’s no use, don’t insist. I do not love you. I can be your friend, not your lover.”

“I am rich and brave, lord of these seas, which my ship ploughs through, fearing no one. I possess immense treasures and I am free to seize whatever riches are within my grasp. Come with me; you will be my queen and lady, my mariners your vassals; for you I shall conquer an isle, you shall have rich gowns of silk and brocade, the costliest jewels,

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slaves always ready to serve you and satisfy your tiniest whim.

Mari-Lope shook her head and replied only the following:

“Keep the riches you offer me for yourself: I do not need them. I cannot be yours, because I am of God.”

Frantic with passion and exacerbated by her refusal, Jean approached Mari and tried to hug her. With superhuman effort, she managed to wrestle free from his Herculean arms around her, and ran from him. Close to home, and when she felt that her salvation was secure, a few of Jean’s sailors came out to meet her, and with considerable force managed to stop her. When the pirate arrived, and once again had her in his arms, from the earth there miraculously sprang forth, between the damsel and her pursuer, a prickly pear cactus with sharp, penetrating thorns. Jean, beside himself, pulled his pistol out from his belt and fired, wounding Mari in the forehead; she fell to the ground, at the same time as a white-winged dove flew up through the sky and disappeared into a cloud. The flash of a lightning bolt dazzled the pirates, who upon recovering saw the body of Jean aflame and the cactus that had miraculously appeared. In the place where this happened, a rustic cross

now stands made from an ancient mesquite tree trunk, with beautiful sulphur-yellow flowers around the base.

The popular fantasy, ever poetic and creative, depicts Mari in a long yellow tunic, with a crude wooden cross on her chest, and with a long, floating veil, wearing a crown of mesquite flowers and carrying a basket filled with the flowers that bear her name: Mari-Lope.

Thus ends the tradition. Dear reader, full of curiosity and lover of the glories of Cienfuegos, if you ever feel that life is weighing you down and your spirit begins to flag, head for the salty shores of Tureira and fix your gaze on the modest Mari-Lope flower. The legend of its origin lies with the pure and innocent damsel who bore its name.

If the path of duty becomes thorny, if the barbs of life break your heart, if your embittered soul moans over life’s gall, if the present is dark and the future terrifies you, remember with love that a weak damsel gave you an example of heroism and knew how to die, without conceding to the brute force that pursued her; acknowledge and gently kiss the modest flower that our ancestors named Mari-Lope in memory of the heroine who offered up love and life to God.

THE BATTLE OF THE CANOES

*(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)*

With the disappearance of the disturbing Aycayia, peace, hard work and good conduct once again reigned over the people of Jagua. The fields provided crops, the hills their birds, and the sea its fish. And there was no terror felt over the raids by enemy tribes, as the people of Jagua were ready to defend their beloved homeland, with arrows and clubs, whether up in the hills, down the valleys or out on the water.

This radical change made the cacique, the behiques and the elders happy, seeing in the benefits bestowed on them the protective hand of the Cemí. And in turn, the hardworking Indians continued to water the Majagua, the tree that protected conjugal fidelity. However, the Ciboney people of Jagua did not give up all their festivals and entertainments. They regularly held their batos or ball games in the batey or plaza of the settlement. Two teams would launch a ball made from resin into the air, striking it at one another with their hands or legs. They would also sometimes hold areítos to celebrate noteworthy events, though they tried not to abuse celebrations of this kind, as they could have an enervating effect. In contrast, they held war simulation exercises more frequently, under the direction of the cacique, in which the two rival sides would attack one another with gusto, and sometimes the taunts would go too far and the conflict would become real, turning into an actual battle field. In these simulations, one individual to stand out was the brave Ornoya, who had the chance on more than one occasion to put his valour and mettle to the test in fierce clashes with enemy Indians, gaining a well-earned reputation as a skilful, invincible warrior. Any time that their homeland was threatened by an attack, the cacique would make Ornoya the leader of the warriors entrusted with repelling the aggressors.

The head cacique of one of the Lucayan islands, Ornocoy, an old fox well versed in the art of war, pillage and plunder, wanting to increase his booty and the number of women captured, prepared a pirate expedition to Jagua port, whose inhabitants had the reputation of being lazy and of preferring the pleasures of song and dance to the hard reality of war. Ornocoy gathered together his men, heavily armed with bows, arrows, spears and clubs, and setting off in 20 long, fast dugout canoes, they headed for Jagua. Navigation in those waters is a hard, arduous task, as the rough sea toys with fragile boats, but the Lucayans were as skilled on the water as they were in war, and, fighting the elements, they made it to the beaches of Jagua. With the canoes in double file, they headed into the port, brandished their weapons and sounded their horns, before uttering their deafening war cries.

Tough old Ornocoy was in one of the first canoes, on his feet, his body painted black and red, feathers in his hair, his eyes sparkling. Slung across his shoulder, his quiver was full of arrows, his bow hanging from his waist, a knotty wooden club in his right hand. Calm and serene, he directs his people, sure of victory.

Among the Ciboney, the alarm was raised and panic and fear gripped their peaceful homes faced with the unexpected appearance of the fierce Lucayans. The Indian mothers ran to their huts and, picking up their young children, hid in the foothills, whereas the men went from one place to another without being able to make any decisions. The ancient cacique, seeing that there was no time to lose, called for his brave Ornoya.

“Ornocoy and his people are coming, and they mean war,” he told him, “to steal our goods and our women, after killing us. Our salvation is in your hands; there are my warriors, lead them to victory or to death.” To which Ornoya replied:

“By the goddess of Jagua, I swear to you that, I either send the Lucayan chief to the bottom of the sea, or I will perish in the attempt.”

He ran straight to the beach, where the warriors were waiting for him, armed but unsure what to do; they dragged the canoes to the sea, jumped in, sounded their shell horns, brandished their spears and clubs, and let out a defiant war cry as they advancing on the enemy.

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Ornoya too led and encouraged his men. He cut a proud figure, with bronzed skin, his head adorned with white and blue feathers, his right arm clutching a solid club.

The clash was horrific. The canoes came together, and Lucayans and Ciboney went at one another with spears and clubs.

The wounded and dead fell to the bottom of the boats or into the sea, canoes were turned over and their occupants continued fighting furiously in the water. The combat was fierce and uncertain for a long time. The invading cacique urged on his men, and set an example of bravery brandishing his huge club, which with every swing destroyed an enemy's skull. Ornoya was a match for him in bravery and fierceness, and had youth in his favour. Annoyed that the battle was still ongoing, and wishing to bring it to a swift end, he decided to go in search of the dreaded cacique. He manoeuvred his canoe and brought it alongside the Lucayan chief's craft, squared up to him and challenged him to fight. They went at one another fiercely with their clubs. With one quick movement, Ornoya dodged a blow from the old warrior and leapt onto the enemy's

canoe, his club held high, which he brought down upon the head of the fierce cacique Ornocoy, who staggered and fell, his skull broken into a hundred pieces.

The death of the chief made the Lucayans flee, whereas the Ciboney, emboldened by the example of Ornoya, doubled their efforts until securing a complete victory. The enemy tried to make away in their canoes that had not been destroyed or sunk, but they were chased down and caught. There were more than two hundred prisoners, with six caciques among them. Ornoya gave the order to head back to the beach, where women, children and elders alike had anxiously witnessed the combat and were now overjoyed as they awaited the victors, the saviours of Jagua.

The waiting crowd's impatience led to jostle, gesticulating and shouting as they waited. The canoes of their warriors approached, in double file, towing the vanquished canoes behind them. There was the Herculean figure of Ornoya, who, his arms crossed and the light feathers blowing in his hair, joined in the rejoicing of his warriors and smiled at the crowd's boundless demonstrations of joy.

THE OLD LADY OF THE PUMPKINS

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

The early years were peaceful for “Fernandina de Jagua”, the colony founded in 1819 by Luis De Clouet and for which it would be some time before it would come to be known as Cienfuegos, in honour of the illustrious son of Gijón, the Lieutenant General of Artillery, José Cienfuegos y Jovellanos, Captain General of the Island, nephew of the distinguished writer and legitimate glory of Hispanic literature, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos.

...The developing settlement of Fernandina de Jagua, despite the pleasant appearance of its surroundings, and the hardworking attitude and peaceful harmony of its inhabitants, was still a modest hamlet of huts and shacks made from “creole” *guamo*, all simple and newly built. There were very few houses made from wood, including those with roofs made of wooden tiles or groundnut leaves, and very few with mud tiles. The hamlet-like appearance of the settlement was also accentuated by the close friendships between the first settlers, regardless of where they were from, be they French, Spanish or natives of the island. They all knew one another and were on familiar terms, and provided one another with mutual help. They led a cordial life, free of disputes, quarrels and rivalries, although it is to be supposed that they were not free of that more or less inoffensive sin of gossip, which is unavoidable when half a dozen families come together, and which by no small means helps make their existence more entertaining.

Just as they all knew one another, the presence of someone from elsewhere was noticed and commented on, and the famous Pamuá, the popular local fellow, let Don Luis know about a newcomer in their midst. Don Luis wasted no time in trying to find out about the life and miracles of the newly arrived individual, and whether or not he had filled out the established legal requirements and was personally willing to work. Were he not, this intruder could be certain that, with no hesitation or second thoughts, he would be set on the

royal road, with the formal recommendation that he continue walking with all due haste until beyond the jurisdictional limit. In the busy beehive of industry founded by Don Luis, there was no room for slackers.

One day, it was noticed that a stranger was among them, which caused no little consternation among the peaceful colony. It was a woman of advanced years, with a suspicious appearance and, according to gossips, a touch of the witch about her. Tall, somewhat stooped, with small, bright eyes, a nose that curved down to converse with the chin, her mouth toothless, her skin wrinkled and earthy. She said she was called Belén, and from then on was known by all as Señá or Ña Belén. She set up home in the neighbourhood of las Calabazas or Pumpkins, which is why she was also known as “the Old Lady of the Pumpkins”.

The presence of Ña Belén was a concern for some days, and gave the gossips of the town much to discuss, and she was even a topic of conversation among the wiser folk. Nobody knew where she came from. Whereas some claimed that she was a poor wretch who, looking to improve her lot, had come from the settlement of Yaguaramas, riding on an ox, which was all that she possessed, others, convinced that she was a witch, stated very formally that she had arrived one Saturday night on a long and filthy broom.

The truth is that Ña Belén was no trouble to anyone, and there was no reason to expel her from the village, to the displeasure of those who, thinking her a real witch, would have liked to be rid of her rather unpleasant appearance. She earned a living as a washerwoman and a healer, and as such earned a reputation, to the extent that she was a fierce rival to the first doctors in the colony, Domingo Mongenié, José Vallejo and the chemist Félix Lanier.

As a result of a few initial successes, due more to chance than to her knowledge, Ña Belén earned herself a reputation as a healer, and it was generally believed that she could heal any sickness, no matter how serious. Those were the glory days for Ña Belén, but, alas, her days of misfortune did not take long to arrive. As with so many others, fortune, fickle as it is, turned its back on her.

It so happened that an increase in fevers occurred as the colder weather set in, and a fair few colonists were affected. They immediately blamed Ña Belén. And as if this weren't enough, they also accused her of being a poisoner and that she made children sick with seizures. Popular fantasy, which sometimes amuses itself by creating the biggest distortions, which it then passes off as the real thing, claimed that, at the slightest oversight by the mothers, Ña Belén would snatch their sick children and carry them away to her miserable shack in Las Calabazas, a great string of children, dead or moribund, hanging

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from her arm. She would then manipulate the bodies in repulsive ways and would obtain a mysterious fat, which she would use, along with certain enigmatic signs and words, to transport herself, riding on her old broom, to the most far-flung places, which some believed to be the Canary Islands. As is to be expected, such tales, which spread from one person to the next, each time altered and enhanced some more, caused alarm and spread panic among the mothers, who did not dare leave their children alone even for a moment, particularly if they were sick.

It is hard to know to what extremes of violence such a collective state of mind would have gone to among the peaceful inhabitants of the early Cienfuegos settlement, had it gone on for longer. Fortunately, overnight, Ña Belén disappeared without trace, and nobody was able to say what had become of her, if she had died or if she had been carried off by the devil. But because uncertainty has no place in the mind of simple naive people, the explanation as to the mysterious disappearance of the Old Lady of the Pumpkins came quickly. It was taken to be true and proven that, one Saturday, as soon as the witch flew up into the sky, riding on her broom and with her great string of dead children hanging from her hand, holding a huge umbrella in her other hand and surrounded by bats and owls, a mother who had just lost her young child saw her, at the exact same time that the witch appeared to reach the moon, and invoked the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. At that very moment, the cursed witch blew up like a rocket, her sparks flew across the heavens and disappeared below the horizon.

Another explanation was given of the witch's disappearance, without it gaining as much acceptance as the first, despite being closer to the truth. It was rumoured that some locals who, like the rest of the village, blamed the witch for the epidemics and other misdemeanours, got together one

night, stealthily made their way to the old woman's shack, killed her and buried her on what would later become the site of a provisions store, of which the owner, who had a twisted sense of humour, named “The Old Lady of the Pumpkins”.

There are those that say neither of these stories is true, and what happened was that the jealous and attentive Luis De Clouet understood that it was dangerous for the colony's sense of calm for Ña Belén to remain there, and managed to convince her to leave, as her life depended on it, and the old woman prudently chose to leave in the dead of night without anyone seeing her.

And when a curious woman asked Don Luis:

“Where is Ña Belén? What's become of her?”

He would reply, in his markedly French form of Spanish, and with a sadly ironic tone:

“Madam, the Old Lady of Pumpkins has gone, informing me that she is prepared to come back, should the occasion arise, to grab any children whose mothers do not care for them as they should, but, rest assured madam, that I will not let the witch come back, as I know how to stop mothers from leaving their children unattended, punishing those who do.”

And indeed, the witch, or whatever she was, did not return to Fernandina de Jagua while Don Luis was alive.

Oh, you loving mothers who so idolise your children, do not abandon them, leaving them in the hands of strangers or mercenaries, to satisfy gossips with keen tongues or those eager for mundane amusement! Remember the Old Lady of the Pumpkins, who may yet keep her fateful promise and take advantage of your lack of attention to snatch your child from you.

GUANAROCA

*(From the book:
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Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)*

To the south-east of the beautiful Cienfuegos Bay, there lies a lagoon of brackish water, into which the Arimao River partly flows.

This is the Guanaroca lagoon, the glassy surface of which reflects the pale moon, the sweet Maroya of the Ciboney people, bringer of dew and benevolent protector of love.

According to the Ciboney legend, the Guanaroca lagoon is the true representation of the moon on earth. Do you know the poetic tradition, dear reader? It is wild and primitive, like the simple beliefs of men living in direct contact with hot, untamed, exuberant nature.

In ancient times, Huion, the sun, would regularly leave the cavern that he used for shelter to rise into the sky and illuminate Ocon, the land, prodigious and fecund, but still without humans. Huion had a wish: to create man, for there to be someone to admire and adore him, waiting every day for him to appear, and who would see in him the all-powerful lord of warmth, light and life.

From Huion’s magic spell there came Hamao, the first man. The sun king now had someone to adore him, to greet him in the mornings with respectful joy from the happy valleys and mountain peaks. This was enough for Huion, and he worried no further for Hamao, for whom the great love that he felt for his creator was not enough to fill his heart. He found himself alone, in the midst of nature’s splendour, with exuberant vegetation full of beings that came together to love one another. In the midst of such universal manifestations of life and love, Hamao felt his spirit flagging and the pointlessness of his solitary existence.

The sensitive and sweet Maroya, the moon, feeling sorry for Hamao, and to sweeten his experience, gave him a companion, creating Guanaroca, or rather, the first woman. Great was the first man’s joy. Finally he had someone with whom he could share pleasures and pains, joy and sadness,

leisure and work. The two loved one another, frantically, with inexhaustible passion, without yet knowing what it was to grow weary. From their union, Imao, the first son, was born.

Guanaroca, finally a mother, poured all her care into her son, and the father, feeling left out, grew jealous and hatched the criminal idea of snatching him from her. One night, while Guanaroca slept, Hamao picked up the tender child and took him off into the hills. The excessive heat and lack of food led the poor weak creature to die. The father, to hide his grief, then took a large green corn stalk, made a hole in it and placed the infant’s cold body inside it, before hanging the stalk from a tree branch.

Upon awaking, and noticing the absence of husband and child, Guanaroca rushed out to look for them. She wandered anxiously through the forest, calling vain for her loved ones, and finally, defeated by her exhaustion, was about to fall to the ground, when the piercing cry of a black bird, probably the smooth-billed ani, made her raise her head, her gaze settling on the corn stalk hanging from the nearby tree. Either due to the innate curiosity that the first woman had already shown, or due to a strange premonition, Guanaroca felt compelled to climb the tree and grab the stalk. She saw that it was perforated and, horrified, thought she could see the body of her beloved child inside. So great was her pain and so intense the emotion, she felt faint and the stalk fell from her hands, falling to the ground; as it broke, she was horrified to see that out of the stalk there came fish, turtles of various sizes and a large amount of liquid that spilled out, running downhill. The greatest wonder that Guanaroca had seen then occurred – the fish formed the rivers that run through the Jagua territory, the largest of the turtles turned into the Majagua peninsula, and the others, in order of size, became the other keys. The burning salty tears of the unhappy mother, who wept inconsolably over the death of her beloved son, form the lagoon and the labyrinth that bears her name: Guanaroca.

THE BLACK VENUS

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

Ten years after De Clouet founded the “Fernandina de Jagua” colony and, at his behest, on 20 May 1829, “Don Fernando VII by the grace of God, King of Castile, etc.”, residing at that time in Aranjuez, granted Cienfuegos the status of royal burgh, “as the place best suited for the population living there, and to perpetuate in the colony the surname of the late honourable Don José Cienfuegos, author and protector of such a useful settlement, etc.”.

Having settled, built their shacks and begun working the land, the group of colonists chosen to form the population along the wide, majestic bay of Jagua began to take an interest, both out of natural curiosity and a desire to know what the surrounding area held, as well as to fish and hunt, in exploring the superb bay, easily the rival of Nipe, visiting its various outcrops, inlets, keys and swamps, and heading up its rivers, and finding ample reasons to admire and feel a sense of satisfaction in the unique area that they had made their home.

They certainly weren’t the first settlers, however. Before them, for countless generations, it had been home to the Ciboney people, now since disappeared due to the pressures of colonisation, which itself was unable to take into account the idiosyncrasy of these simple people not accustomed to hard labour. As a primitive race, when they disappeared they left no trace other than the memory of their customs, their language and their traditions.

One of the keys that the colonists first visited was Cayo Loco or Crazy Key, also known as Cayo Güije, in the port itself. It’s said that this key was formed by the bits of earth and vegetation dragged down by the currents and heavy flow of the rivers, helped by the sea’s tidal movements and the winds. Scientifically this does seem to be the case. The Ciboney tradition is very different, however. Readers

will remember the legend of Guanaroca. In a jealous rage, Hamao, the first man, buried his young son Imo or Imao in a corn stalk, which he hung from a tree. When the mother, Guanaroca, the first mother, discovers the stalk, it falls from her hands, and from it there spill several fish and turtles of varying sizes. The fish turned into the rivers that flow into the broad Jagua bay, the largest turtle became the Majagua peninsula, and the others turned into the various keys. In a fight with a large fish or sea monster, the largest turtle, the hawksbill, somehow lost its left leg, as it came off, floated in the water and became “Cayo Loco”. Between the geological and the mythological explanations, readers are free to choose the one that best suits their tastes and inclinations.

A surprise was awaiting the colonists when they first visited Cayo Loco. On it they found a young black woman living, dressed only in what mother nature had provided. She was extremely well mannered, and her figure so perfect, that the most demanding artist would have considered her a model of feminine beauty. Such was the effect that she caused among the colonists that they named her the “Black Venus” and the “Ebony Beauty”, although the former was more common.

Upon seeing the colonists, the woman fled, not from shyness but from fear. They ran after her, and caught her up, but whatever they said to her, she would not respond, and simply stared at them with her large, frightened eyes. At first they thought that she didn’t understand the languages in which they were talking to her, but they later became convinced that she did not talk because she was mute.

Even though she was the only inhabitant of that key, and had no one to impress but herself, she (a woman, after all) adorned her splendid nudity with necklaces and bracelets made from strings of seeds from lianas and trees, and from shells and conches.

Having said that she lived alone, that isn’t quite the truth. She had two winged companions, a blue heron and a white dove, who had been tamed to such an extent that wherever she went, they went with her, the dove usually on her shoulder, with the heron going before her. It was fascinating to see these gracious birds spread their wings, stretching their necks and placing their beaks in the mouth of their mistress, like a mute caress.

One of the colonists, in a show of compassion, took the Black Venus home with him, fed her and gave her clothes to wear. The man thought that, as a reward for his

THE BLACK VENUS

*(From the book:
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compassionate gesture, the beautiful negress would gladly perform the tasks that he bade her, as it is reasonably common that behind an apparent act of philanthropy hides selfishness, and that favours are given with a view to being rewarded. Upon finding herself captive with the pretext of having been done a favour, the Black Venus, born to live free and without shackles in the midst of nature, being unable to protest with words, did so instead with deeds, an altogether more eloquent form of protest. She took to spending hours and hours curled up in a corner, passively refusing to get up, work or eat. As the days passed, she became thinner and thinner at an alarming rate, and fearful that she would starve to death, the colonist took her back to Cayo Loco to live again in freedom, in the company of her loyal winged companions, eating wild fruit and birds that she skilfully hunted, crab, oysters, clams and all manner of seafood that the sea’s bounty offered up to her.

Every time that the locals of Cienfuegos tried to bring the Venus Negra into civilised life, putting her up in their homes and providing her with gowns, she would refuse to work or eat, and in the end they chose not to bother her, letting her live as she pleased, queen and lady of the solitary key, the blue heron and white dove her only subjects.

The Black Venus isn’t one of those people of legend, more made up than real, created through popular fantasy. The Black Venus was a being of flesh and blood, and her existence is accounted for by, among others, Pedro Modesto Hernández, from Cienfuegos, and who knows better than anyone of the past and present of his beloved homeland, who provided the information used in publishing this book.

According to Pedro Modesta, on one afternoon back in 1876, when he was a child, and while a large military convoy was moving out, a black and by now elderly woman crept into his house. Her hair looked like a huge bobble of white cotton. She was completely naked, wearing only a necklace of blue, red and white beads.

Pedro’s family gave her clothes to wear, which she refused, and they had to use force to get her to cover up. She was served abundant and varied food, but abstained from any seasoned dishes, yet devoured raw bananas, agave and sweet potato with alarming speed. They allowed her to spend the night there, and the following morning, when they went to look for her, found only the clothes. She took with her only her large bead necklace, the only thing she felt was right to adorn her body.

That woman was the Black Venus, from whom the years had taken her youthful beauty. It was the last time she was seen. She mysteriously disappeared, and was never heard of again.

Today, the Black Venus has become a figure of legend, embodying the negro’s mute protest against slavery. It is also the affirmation of the wild being who loves freedom and refuses to adapt to the shackles of civilisation. Popular fantasy, ever poetic and creative, has it that on nights with a new moon, and preferably when it is raining, as solitude and quiet are more likely, the Black Venus comes out of her secret hiding place and wanders around the abandoned courtyards and the lonely streets, bringing comfort to the helpless and restful sleep to those who are suffering.

ORNOYA

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

Jagua got ready to honour its hero, the victor of the fierce and terrible Lucayan cacique, Ornoco.

The name Ornoya was on everyone’s lips: it was mentioned with pride by elders, with admiration by young warriors, with joy by children, with gratitude by mothers and with love by damsels.

The elderly Ciboney cacique wanted to reward the intrepid leader as he deserved.

In the large *batey* or central plaza, surrounded by leafy kapok trees, slender palms and swaying wild canes, people gathered for the grand ceremony to honour the hero. The Cansí, or mansion of the cacique, which stood facing the *batey*, was adorned with multi-coloured cotton blankets, forming a large canopy on one side, under which sat the Ciboney cacique, surrounded by the chief behique, the principal elders and other members of his court.

The sound of sea shell horns being blown and voices singing war hymns could be heard in the distance. The crowd made way, leaving part of the *batey*, and after a time, at one end of the plaza, four young Indians appeared, blowing occasionally into the hoarse, thunderous sea shells. They were followed by the warriors, and there was Ornoya, sporting his brightest feathers and wearing a fine cloak dotted with thin shells over his shoulders, a necklace with thick pearly beads and gold bracelets on his wrists. Behind him, with their hands tied, their eyes down, with a sullen gaze, walked the six crestfallen defeated caciques, who were subjected to the ridicule and mockery of the crowd. At the tail of the procession was a large group of Ciboney warriors, signing war songs, some armed with spears, others with clubs, and all with a quiver full of arrows and a large bow hanging from the waist.

As Ornoya passed, he was greeted with cheers, and flowers and leaves were thrown at his feet. Mothers lifted their children up to better see the hero, and the damsels smiled at him lovingly and admiringly.

As he came in front of the cacique, Ornoya tried to give a low bow, but the cacique stopped him, saying:

“The son of Huoion should kneel before no mortal. Your father sent you to save these Jagua lands from invasions and raids by the fierce Lucayans. You rose to the challenge. You carried your brothers to victory and you in noble battle you defeated the bold and feared Orconoy, who will no longer spread terror and despair amongst us. The people of Jagua salute you and honour you as their saviour, and your achievements, passed down from one generation to the next, perpetuated by legend, will still be heard in ages to come, your name being immortalised on earth, as an example of those who defend the safety of the home and the freedom and independence of the homeland.”

Having finished, he removed his necklace and placed it around Ornoya’s neck, and gave him his solid club. The young warrior sat down next to the elderly cacique, and the festivities began.

They started with a game of batos, led by the *tequina* or chief. The two sides, one of young men and the other of young women, lined up opposite each other, and at the signal of the *tequina*, the ball was tossed into the air, which was then sent back and forth from one team to the other, the players making sure to grab it in the air, either before or after it bounced on the ground. The side that failed to return the ball, lost a point.

This was followed by dances and songs, accompanied by *atabal* drums, made from hollow wood, whistles made from vines or bean pods, or large sea shell horns, made by cutting a hole through them. The samba, the lead singer, sang the first verse of a song, to a rhythmical, monotonous tune, and then repeated the chorus. First to dance were the damsels, who displayed all their grace and powers of seduction in honour of Ornoya, then it was the men’s turn to dance, and finally they danced together.

The last events of the festivities were simulations of war. Two sides came forward to face one another, each with a leader, and on a signal from the cacique, they acted out an attack with their spears and clubs, moving and spinning quickly to strike and dodge the blows from their weapons.

The last rays of the sun were heading behind the neighbouring hill when the festivities finally came to an end, and in honour of the invincible warrior, the entire Jagua settlement, all together in the large *batey*, cried out loud and long: “Ornoya! “Ornoya! Ornoya!”

And the echo of their cries was as though his glorious name would last for eternity, so that other eras and other races would one day know of him.

THE CHRIST OF THE PATHWAY

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

The colonial government was not keen on building roads and highways, with major consequences for the country, which was unable to make the most of its wealth and natural resources, and clearly making life difficult for people, who to get from one point of the island to another had to make arduous journeys that could often be dangerous.

These inconveniences did not stop neighbouring Trinidad (which was founded in 1514 following an order given by Diego Velásquez de Cuellar, Conqueror of Cuba, coincidentally while visiting the port of Jagua) managing to prosper thanks to its maritime location, the hard work and entrepreneurial spirit of its inhabitants, and the benefits it reaped from contraband in an era of strict trade prohibitions. For the opposite reason, its prosperity grew by declaring that it was free of trade and by developing coffee plantations and factories.

In the era of the legend of the Christ of the Pathway, Trinidad still retained all its old splendour and wealth, which had made it famous both in Cuba and overseas. The railway line to Havana did not yet exist, and going by boat as far as Batabanó was difficult, long and unsafe, so for the people of Trinidad to get to the capital, they had to take the old track from Trinidad to Havana, which ran close to Jagua castle, la Milpa, Pasa Caballos and Las Auras. The last of these places, Las Auras, was where the virtuous protectors of the Ciboney people, Bartolomé de las Casas and Pedro de la Rentería, who did so much to help the Indians, lived around 1511.

One day, a few people walking along the track were surprised by the mysterious apparition of a human-sized Christ, which was hanging from a thick, rough cross made

from the trunk of a copperwood tree. It aroused curiosity, and now it was not only those walking the road forced to pass by who would stop, in admiration and contrition, but curious people would come from far and wide who had heard about the divine apparition. It did not take long for it to be thought of as miraculous intervention, which the facts would appear to confirm. The kind-hearted Christ gave protection to travellers and restored the sick to health. But as if this were not enough, it was said that through his largesse he also helped the poor who would humbly approach and throw themselves at his feet, asking for relief from their ills, to have their health restored, or for a remedy for this shortcomings and misery. The miraculous fame of the Christ of the Pathway quickly spread throughout the Jagua area, then up into the Sierra, into the Táyaba valley and the land that would later be known as Las Villas, and people of all class and status made their way to the spot, some in search of health, others asking for money, and some for both.

Unfortunately, not everything always goes to plan, and true happiness is not so easily attained. It is not therefore overly strange for something bad to follow something good, and, indeed, staying true to that law, next to the apparition of the miraculous Christ of the Pathway, doer of good deeds, the presence of other mysterious figures began to be felt, who were far from holy, and who were devoted to that very human task of robbing from others and taking what they had on them.

So while the miraculous Christ, caring and kind-hearted, cured the sick with the crystal-clear water that sprang from the foot of the cross, and generously helped the needy by quietly depositing a few coins in their saddlebags or elsewhere in their saddle, other individuals, hiding in the marshes or in the scrubland of the hills, waiting for the naive traveller to pass, ready to steal their bag and any valuable items of clothing they might be wearing. Such were the attacks and robberies that there were few who would dare to pass through without being accompanied by friends or an armed escort, as the only way to prevent an attack from bandits.

As well as the attacks and robberies, there were also kidnappings, carried out with considerable audacity and on nearby farms, and which went unpunished, leading to a sense of fear and disquiet among the people living in the area.

The Governor of the Island in those calamitous times was the successor of Ricafort and the predecessor of Ezpeleta, a famous general, servile in Spain and tyrannical in Cuba,

THE CHRIST OF THE PATHWAY

*(From the book:
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who during the time that he was governor, from 1834 to 1838, was the first to sow discord among islanders and Spaniards, opposed constitutional freedoms being established in the colony, and who, as proconsul, harshly put an end to abuses, halting gambling, imprisoning and deporting wrongdoers, and successfully persecuted thieves and highway robbers.

It so happened, therefore, that one morning, those who had to travel along the danger spots, were surprised by the macabre sight of a dead man hanging by a rope from the branches of the ancient copperwood tree. The morning breeze made the body swing gently, around which hungry vultures were circling.

Was it a suicide, a murder, an act of vengeance or justice? It was hard to know what had happened. What was beyond doubt was that the hanged man, judging by his face and his clothes, was the same man crucified on the pathway.

Of course, it must have been no more than an illusion that would have had more people incredulous than ready to believe, but what is true is that from that day on, after the hanged man appeared, the robberies and armed attacks that had made journeys through Las Auras to La Sierra so dangerous ceased to occur, and what is even more extraordinary and inexplicable, is that the miracles that the Christ of the Pathway had performed and dispensed also ceased to occur. And in keeping with the law of contrasts and opposites, just as after a good thing came the bad, so it happened that once the latter disappeared, so did the former. And some of the poor folk who received gifts no doubt missed the bandits who attacked and kidnapped those with considerable means.

The gossips who took to saying that the hanged man had the same face as Christ later stated that a partner of the dead man from the Canary Islands used the loot from his thieving, robberies and kidnapping. For years, large amounts of money obtained from such illicit means were stored in earthenware pitchers known as botijas, used to store olive oil, hidden in a black well in the batey of a certain farm. At the start of the 1868 war, the pitchers were taken out and broken, and part of the money was used to buy a stone, with which a house was built in which the sinful soul of the Christ of the Pathway aimlessly wanders in anguish. Another, larger part of the money was spent on lawsuits and stamped paper, according to the superstitious, who believe that ill-gotten gains come to no good, which unfortunately does not seem to be confirmed by the facts. Incredulous folk, however, who have no faith in the fair-minded plans of providence, are convinced, although we have no way of knowing why, that the money in question is stored away in the safety deposit boxes of a foreign bank, to Cuba's sad loss.

Who is right in all this? Who knows?! In these delicate matters, in which history and legend are so closely connected, it is hard to come to a definite solution, and the impartial narrator (which we hope to be) must stick to relating the different opinions, without making any claims ourselves.

We must, therefore, be satisfied by knowing that there was a Christ of the Pathway, who bestowed gifts, and at the same time there was a bandit, who robbed and kidnapped, and that although they would seem to be two separate people, there are those who believe them to have been one and the same.

JAGUA

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

Hamao, with the jealous feelings that the god of evil sowed in his heart, had felt the first pain; Guanaroca, with the loss of her son, the first and biggest pain that a mother can feel. Hamao eventually realised how irrational his jealousy was, and came to understand a father's love. Guanaroca forgave him, and as a result, some time later, their second son was born: Caunao.

Happy and peaceful was his childhood, under the constant loving protection of his mother. The boy became a man, and began to feel a sense of vague concern and a deep sadness. He was unable to realise how it affected his state of mind, making him indifferent to life in general. One day, on returning to his lonely hut, he stopped to watch two little birds who were sharing affectionate caresses on a tree branch. It was then that he understood the reason for his sorrow. He was alone in the world, and had no companion to caress and to be caressed by, with whom he could share his troubles, his joys, his hopes and dreams.

There was only one woman on earth, and that was Guanaroca, who had given birth to him.

Wandering around the countryside, trying in vain to distract himself from his feelings of loneliness, he saw a leafy tree, tall and round.

From its branches hung abundant fruit, large, oval and brownish in colour. Many of them were fully ripe, and were dropping from the tree, falling to the ground and breaking apart, with some of them revealing their fleshy interior and small seeds.

Caunao felt an irresistible desire to taste the fruit, and, picking up one of the more attractive specimens, sunk his teeth into it. The taste was bitter-sweet and pleasing, and Caunao savoured the abundant gift of food that nature had so generously provided.

Such was his enjoyment that he headed home for a palm-leaf basket to fill with the rare fruit, which he found to be so tasty.

On his return, Caunao began to gather them together into a pile, and was about to load them into the basket, when a ray of moonlight hit the pile of fruit, and from them there grew a wonderful being, and a different sex to that of Caunao.

It was a woman.

A young, beautiful woman, sunny, with beautiful manners, velvet-smooth golden skin, with large, soulful and expressive eyes, with a red, smiling mouth, and long, full jet-black hair.

Caunao gazed on with a growing sense of ecstasy. As though enchanted, he felt that his heart was shedding all sense of sadness and of melancholy, replaced by joy and love. No longer would he walk through life alone. He had someone to love, and to love him.

This beautiful companion, created from a moon ray and a pile of ripe fruit, was a gift from Maroya, the goddess of the night, who, just as she had solved the loneliness of Hamaom, the first man, by sending him Guanaroca, the first woman, so did she wish to bring joy to the existence of Caunao, their son, by sending him the gift of another woman.

Caunao loved her from the very first moment with all the passion of which his young heart, starved of affection, was capable. He made her his, and she was the mother of his children.

This second woman was called Jagua, a word that means richness, mine, spring, source and beginning. And her name was also given to the tree from whose fruit she had emerged, and due to which it was considered sacred. Jagua, the wife of Caunao, was who set down the laws to the natives, the peaceful Ciboney, to whom she taught the art of fishing and of hunting, the growing of crops, songs, dance and how to cure different types of sickness.

Guanaroca was the mother of the first men; Jagua the mother of the first women. The children of Guanaroca, mother of Caunao, procreated with the daughters of Jagua, and from those first couples came all the humans on earth.

According to the Dominican tradition, Cihualohuatl, the serpent woman, was the mythological Eve who gave birth two by two, always a male and a female, to ensure the species would reproduce and perpetuate.

The Ciboney tradition is more moral in nature. Guanaroca, the Cuban Eve, only had sons, and in turn, Jagua, the second Eve, only had daughters, joining in union as couples for reproduction.

PAMUÁ

(From the book:
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Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

“You cry as much as Pamua.”

“Yes, she’s a pretty girl, but the creature cries more than Pamua.”

“He’s stingy and a scrounger like Pamua.”

“Don’t pester me; you make less sense than Pamua.”

“Be careful with Juan; he’s more of a tattletale than Pamua.”

And always Pamua...

Who could this person be who is so frequently named, and who from my experience must break the record for tears, whining and nonsense, and who moreover suffered from the major personality defect of being a snitch?

To discover the history of this name, I went searching in biographical dictionaries. Nothing did I find. I went about the same investigations in encyclopaedias, with the same result. When I set about asking our Academy of History, I was told by an old and elderly friend of the institution that Pamua had been a local fellow of popular tradition, from the early years of the colony. But that’s all I was able to glean. I then decided to enquire about various notices about such a busy figure and using information taken from here and there that I have been able to find about his character and customs.

I don’t intend to write his biography, as no narrative would be worthy of the name of the facts about the man of whom nothing is known about his lineage, his actual legitimate name or where he was born, and with mystery hanging over the village, town or city where the mortal remains of such a famous individual were laid to rest.

In my opinion, Pamua, a corruption or poor translation of the French *pour-moi*, was the name given to the individual also known as Lagrimita or Teary One.

Nobody knows exactly when Pamua arrived in Fernandina de Jagua. Some claim that he was a travelling companion of Don Luis and of the early settlers from Bordeaux. Others say that he arrived some time after, in the expedition that came later from New Orleans in 1821. And there are those who claim that he arrived in a schooner from Santiago de Cuba, and a few people believe he was from Santa Clara. But if there are doubts about when and how he came to Fernandina de Jagua, his place of birth is even more of a mystery, and the only thing everyone can agree on is that he was not born under a Cuban sky.

Pamua was a tall man, slim, strong, almost athletic, a tough fellow who had lived a bit; he had a small, bony head, pale green eyes, a snub nose, large mouth, his teeth consisted of two upper canine teeth and four long and yellowing incisors, a long, thin, greying moustache, a few rough grey whiskers on his chin, and short greying hair.

His clothing was almost always an old, threadbare military coat that was too tight, short-sleeved, suggesting that the deceased owner had been smaller. It still had a few golden buttons on it, and the outfit was completed with a felt hat and flannel trousers also with a military cut. His feet went as unshod as the day he was born, and had grown through use.

A popular chap, both ridiculed and feared at the same time, as according to all he had a silver tongue that every day would whisper into the ears of the Founder, recounting everything that happened in Fernandina de Jagua.

He had the tricky skill of being able to produce tears at will, something that he used greatly to his favour, which would have been the envy of the wailing and weeping women of old. Over anything and over nothing, he would suddenly launch into pitiful moaning, and from his eyes would flow a stream of tears, leading to the colonist either feeling sorry for him or fearing him, always managing to get what he wanted. With all this and his relations with Don Luis he managed to get along, and there are those who believe that he managed to save a few hundred Seville reales.

His cautious cat-like gait and his suspicious gaze completed his intriguing and challenging physique.

PAMUÁ

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Valle, 1919.)

He worked for Don Luis, who through him enjoyed an abundant source of information, until one day through his own bad luck he became involved with a certain Frenchman, a tailor by trade, who had been entrusted with maintaining order in the colony and was one of the valiant defenders in the battle of the Yuquinos.

Greatly concerned as he was with maintaining the reputation of his business, he was even more so with that of his own honour, to the extent that gossips of the time said that he would see visions, something that was, to a certain extent, true. The tailor, it is said, had a young French woman as a companion, the most beautiful woman that anyone had laid eyes on in Cienfuegos, tall, graceful, elegantly dressed, with wavy, golden hair, eyes of the purest sky blue, coral-red lips, beautiful pearls, swan-like neck, arms of a goddess, hands of a sylph, breasts... I will not go on for fear of exaggerating what was told to me. I will only add that to cap it all as regards just how perfect she was, this Madame had a voice so sweet and with such a lovely tone, that nightingales would wish to have to sing their romantic laments, such were her charms and beauty in terms of grace and agreeableness, worthy of being an olive-skinned lady of Cienfuegos.

As the French woman realised that she enjoyed being admired, she spent a large part of the day at her window, where she would receive greetings, compliments and visits, including from Pamua or Lagrimita, with his eternal requests for *pour-moi*.

As said, he was the confidante, protégé and blabber-mouth of the Founder, who, although he was the Governor, a Christian and all round great man, he had the reputation in his younger days of calling on certain windows and of drinking from the wells of others.

With such a treasure of a wife, with the visits of Pamua and the reputation of the Founder with regard to ladies, anyone in the tailor's position would have taken precautions. Which is what the Monsieur did, and with great noise and commotion he protested amorously to his Madame, but neither of them amended their ways or admitted their errors. The Frenchman therefore changed tactic and, using flattery, managed to attract the attention of Pamua, though flattery were hardly needed to have him buzzing around like a bothersome fly. Thus, on one visit Pamua obtained a buckle, and the next day a button, and so on, until one day he ordered a coat.

The tailor accepted the order and was all smiles as he took his measurements, promising him that on Sunday by the latest, before mass, he would be able to try it on.

Sunday came, and as the faithful walked past the tailor's door, which incidentally displayed a sign that read: “French tailor of H.M. the King and Emperor”, they noticed that the workshop was shut, and that from inside they could hear a voice begging and sobbing with pitiful wailing, and they recognised that the voice who wept and wailed so deeply belonged to Pamua. And they all thought more or less the same thing:

“Looks like it's the tailor's turn to suffer Pamua's annoying requests.”

And there was the odd voice or two that called out, so it could be heard:

“Don't give in, Maestro. Don't go soft, Monsieur.”

It later transpired that the tailor had measured Pamua's body and had him try on swathes of guava leaves cut from the immediate environs of San Alejandro, threatening him that if he saw him anywhere near his house again, the vultures would enjoy a sumptuous feast on the Marsillán beach.

Wisdom comes from learning, and Pamua took the tailor at his word, and was never seen or heard of again. Some claim that Pamua, like a soul taken by the devil, on that same Sunday afternoon and without taking leave of his protector or saying goodbye to anyone, set off for Trinidad, where he died; others say that he reached Santiago de Cuba, where he ended his days in an alms-house.

And there are those who say that Luis de Docluet never got over the loss of his faithful Pamua.

LA TATAGUA

(From the book:
“Traditions and Legends of
Cienfuegos”, by Adrián del
Valle, 1919.)

Aipirí was a beautiful mestiza from prehistoric Jagua. Arrogant, coquettish, chatty, given to dressing in bright colours, with stones and shells, earrings and bracelets in red metal, and bright red flowers in her hair to stand out from the other women and attract attention to herself.

How pretty Aipirí was!

Svelte, olive-skinned, with full black hair and almond eyes, with an insinuating, caressing, provocative gaze. She sang and danced with great passion. Her greatest pleasure was to attend parties and celebrations, where she could show off her melodious voice and her graceful skills as a dancer.

Pursued in love by a great Ciboney hunter, she her destiny to his and would have set up a modest, pleasant but happy home, if her aspirations had matched those of a hard-working woman who lived for her husband and her children. But for Aipirí that was not enough.

She hadn't been born to lead a quiet life, looking after the home and other people. She loved her diversions too much, the pleasures of life, songs, dances, adornments, the flattery, the praise. Thus it was that, after a short time, the home for her became a pain, and barely had she given birth to her first child before she felt nostalgia for her time as a damsel, and the tender child's charms failed to steal her heart. She fought it at first, and tried to remove herself from temptation's path. The instinct of her free-spirited, untamed nature was proved stronger than a mother's love, and she began to go missing from the home, her absences becoming longer, until she was spending more time elsewhere than at home. And while the abandoned child would cry, his uncaring mother would spend time making merry with neighbours or attending gatherings and celebrations, entertaining folk with her songs and the elegance of her dances. When evening fell, she would return home, just before her husband would get back from his daily arduous excursions into the hills in search of sustenance.

One child followed another, until there were six, but there was no change to the wayward mother's behaviour. She continued with her long, furtive escapades, without her poor naive husband finding out. The children were constantly left alone, went hungry, lived a life of abandonment and misery, picked up bad habits and were always crying, filling the air with the constant sound of waah, waah, waah.

As their pretty hut stood on its own the middle of the countryside, Aipirí never worried that her children's crying might bother the neighbours, nor that they would ever tell her husband. She hadn't counted on Mabuya, the genie of evil, who is everywhere and who is by no means amused by the prolonged, unending crying of children. It has to be said that he has good reason, as only a mother's patience can suffer the unpleasant sound of children wailing with good grace.

Mabuya, tired of hearing them and seeing that there seemed to be no end to their crying, nor of the mother's dances, festivities and lack of care, perhaps feared that those poorly brought up children would grow up as heartless, cruel and inhumane as he was. In a fit of temper, he transformed them into a kind of poisonous shrub, known today as guao, or toothed maidenplum.

In the plant kingdom, the guao is rather like a stigma, a dry and sterile tree, its resin and leaves cause swelling and sores, and its very shadow is said to be harmful. According to the tradition, that is what the children of Aipirí were turned into, at the fault of the uncaring mother.

If the spirit of evil had to punish the children for the faults of the mother, the spirit of goodness, which is more just, imposed a corrective measure on the person responsible for the harm done, that it might be taken as an example. It transformed Aipirí into Tatagua, a nocturnal butterfly with a thick body and short wings, also known as a bruja or witch.

There is a general belief that brujas or large butterflies that are dark in colour had an evil significance, announcing a misfortune and even the death of a relative wherever they enter. It is a distortion of the true meaning assigned to the tradition of the tatagua or bruja when it flies into a home, flies around and then lands.

According to this tradition, by transforming the mother who ignored her duties into the nocturnal butterfly, the good spirit made it so that, when the butterfly shows itself to mothers, it warns them of the sacred nature of their obligations, and that, regardless of any festivities, dances or celebrations, they must never abandon their innocent children.

Good and saintly mothers of Cienfuegos, who devote your waking hours to the care of the fruit of your loins, when you see a Tatagua butterfly in the home, think on whether you have missed any of your duties in the daily ups and downs of the care that you provide.

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