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Where to Find Cuba in Miami

by [Ana Sofia Pelaez](#) 11.15.2014



The array at Brazo Fuerte. All photos by Ana Sofia Pelaez.

We continue Chefs Travels week with a trip to Cuba by way of Florida. Ana Sofía Peláez, Brooklyn-based author of the recently released [The Cuban Table: A Celebration of Food, Flavors, and History](#), gave us a tour of the places where she finds la vida Cubana when she's back in Miami.

MIAMI – Miami born and raised, I left to study in New York, eventually landing in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, where I currently live. It hasn't stopped me from going back as often as possible, though Miami stubbornly refuses to stay exactly as I left it. Growing up in a Cuban family, I appreciate the effort they put into transmitting the culture they weren't willing to give up. Now I can appreciate how that love has shaped the city that's grown up along with them and been revitalized with successive waves of immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean. I try to hit as much of the old as the new with each trip back. Here are some favorites that keep me coming home:

[Ermita de la Caridad](#)

3609 South Miami Ave.; +1-305-854-2404

A national shrine dedicated to Cuba's patron saint, la Caridad del Cobre, this pilgrimage site is the heart of Miami's exile community. Built like a music box and surrounded by water, you have the feeling it will unmoor and float away at any moment.

[De La Cruz Collection Contemporary Art Space](#)

23 NE 41st St.; +1-305-576-6112

An extensive contemporary art collection in Miami's Design District that's privately owned but free to the public. Stand-out Cuban artists Ana Mendieta and Félix González-Torres are on permanent display, including the *Untitled*, billboard of a bird in flight created by González-Torres that dominates the facade.



Ice cream at ¡Azucar! Photo by Carmen Pelaez.

[¡Azucar!](#)

1503 SW 8th St.; +1-305-381-0369

I love stepping over the brightly colored Cuban titles of this sun-drenched Calle Ocho ice cream shop and getting comfortable on the guayabera-lined banquettes. Local favorites include Abuela Maria (vanilla blended with cream cheese, guava, and Maria crackers), guarapiña (sugar cane and pineapple juice), and egg-rich mantecado (Cuban vanilla), but there's always something new to try.

[Cigar Boutique of Little Havana](#)

1110 SW 8th St.; +1-305-285-9154

My love of cigars is inversely related to my affection for cigar shops. It's too tempting to step inside and breathe in the history, even when it comes with a heady dose of aromatic smoke. Once the site of El Credito Cigar Factory that produced La Gloria Cubana cigars, the Calle Ocho shop, now run by former employees, has plenty of both.

[El Brazo Fuerte Bakery](#)

1697 SW 32nd Ave; +1-305-444-7720

I love this family-owned shop for their unchanging lineup of pastries and desserts — including classics like sweet and savory menesiers and sugary yemitas — that have fallen out of other bakeries repertoires.



An inside look into Tinta y Café.

[Tinta y Café](#)

268 Calle Ocho; +1-305-285-0101

Pulling in regulars from both their Little Havana neighborhood and nearby Brickell, suited-up finance guys and suited-up firemen, as well as hipsters and housewives, line up at the coffee spot to talk about everything and nothing over cortados, flaky pastries, and empanadas. It's not your typical ventanita, but it's just as fun. Their el pecado coffee — espresso layered with condensed milk, espresso, steamed evaporated milk, and topped with the perfect milky foam — is too good to pass up.

[Maximo Gomez Park - aka Domino Park](#)

801 SW 15th Ave; +1-305-285-1684

Don't worry about distracting the players that congregate at Domino Park, because nothing takes their mind off the game. Sitting down to play, however, is another matter, so it's probably best to just watch from the sidelines and enjoy the banter heard over the click-clack of the dominos.

[La Camaronera](#)

1952 W Flagler St.; +1-305-642-3322

The Little Havana fish-fry stand and market has recently expanded to include a dining area, but you should take your place at the counter to stand elbow-to-elbow with the other customers at least once. They're best known for the pan con minuta breaded fish sandwich served with the tail still on, but their unbelievably tender

and barely sweet shrimp is a personal favorite.



The Freedom Tower covered in lizards.

[Freedom Tower \(MDC Museum of Art + Design\)](#)

600 Biscayne Blvd; +1-305-237-7700

A Spanish-style landmark building from 1925 once housed The Miami News, but is best known as the processing center for countless Cuban immigrants, making it the Ellis Island of the South. A permanent installation on the ground floor tells their story, while the upper floors are dedicated to visual art and design exhibitions.

[Bread+Butter](#)

2330 Salzedo St.; +1-305-442-9622

Chef and owner Alberto Cabrera pushes the limits of traditional food at his Coral Gables gastropub by way of a Cuban cafeteria with amazing results. Tamal en cazuela is topped with smoked oxtail and frita hamburger comes with kimchi, but the Humboldt Fog flan arrives repurposed in cans just like at home, keeping the old guard happy and the up and comers interested.

[Enriqueta's Sandwich Shop](#)

2830 NE 2nd Ave; +1-305-573-4681

Before Downtown Miami's Wynwood became an open-air gallery filled with shops, cafes, and restaurants,

there was Enriqueta's. Owned by Jose Luis Pla and his daughters, one look into their all-female galley-style kitchen makes it clear who is running the ship. They also have the best pan con bistec and possibly the best flan in Miami.



Healthy bites for everyone at El Palacio de los Jugos.

[El Palacio de los Jugos](#)

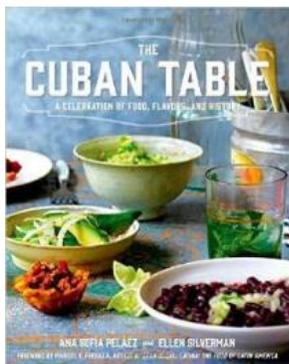
5721 W Flagler St.; +1-305-264-1503

A warren of food stations selling arroz con grí and arroz con pollo, roasted pork and chicharrones, tamales and plate-sized tostones. What they don't make on-site is brought in from the family's farm. Remember to pick up few bars of their homemade guava paste and fresh cheese to take with you.

[Hoy Como Ayer](#)

2212 SW 8th St.; +1-305-541-2631

A Cuban music venue is always packed but somehow never feels crowded. There's a revolving roster of acts, but it really comes alive when house band SPAM Allstars hold their Thursday night free-form descarga electrónica.



TIME TO START COOKING

Buy [The Cuban Table: A Celebration of Food, Flavors, and History](#), Ana Sofía Peláez and Ellen Silverman (Amazon)

[Ana Sofía Peláez](#)

Ana Sofia is a Miami-born and Brooklyn-based food blogger covering the spectrum of Spanish and Latin American cuisine and the author of *The Cuban Table: A Celebration of Food, Flavors, and History* (St. Martin's Press, 2014). You can follow her at @HungrySofia on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. She travels for the endless array of things to see, eat, and do — but mostly to eat.