Inside Havana

LEGENDARY CUBAN COCKTAILS
One of the world’s most famous authors once proclaimed that Paris and Venice were the only cities in the world that can compete with the beauty of Havana. Maybe Ernest Hemingway was right. Through the years, the old city has seduced innumerable visitors with its astonishing beauty, the maze of narrow streets and charming bars. The atmosphere in Havana is hard to find anywhere else; an ambience that has given birth to thousands of tales about ancient glory and passionate love stories and to some of the very first cocktails. It was here, in the hot and humid heart of Cuba, that bartenders started serving Mojito, Daiquiri and Cuba Libre to customers from all over the world.

In the 1940’s, Havana was an entertainment hub for the rich and famous. Ernest Hemingway had his favourite hang out at popular bars La Bodeguita del Medio and El Floridita. These were also the places where you would run into celebrities like Frank Sinatra and Marlon Brando. Another great celebrity stake out was the city’s countless casinos. For those looking for more quiet entertainment there were about 135 cinemas in Havana to choose from. This was a time when Havana had a financial turnover that was higher than in Las Vegas. A time when the money and cocktails were flowing and everyone enjoyed the fruits of life like there was no tomorrow.

Decades have passed since those glory days. But if you look behind the worn facades and the rundown bars, Havana is the same city that Hemingway, Sinatra and Brando fell in love with. The vibe is still there, in the rundown bars, in the streets of Havana and in the hearts of the Cubans. In the street corners and on the stairs of beautiful but timeworn houses, people are enjoying each other’s company by extending their living rooms out towards the streets, sometimes by carrying out the sofa and simply placing it on the street for a better overview. The setting is coloured by music that is pouring out from apartments, bars and the instruments of street musicians. Havana’s residents still live in the present - in the loud discussions on the street corners, in the old but classy cars, in the bars and in the music. Sometimes you might even experience a time lapse as an old veteran car cruises by in the street, just like time had never passed.
If the heat and humidity should for a while put a damper on your will to discover the city you should ask one of the friendly Cubans for the way to Hemingway’s favourite bar La Bodequita del Medio – a charming and vivid hang out in one of the narrow alleys that despite the many tourists visiting has managed to stay genuine. Quench your thirst with a Mojito and read Hemingway’s own words on the wall: “My Mojito in La Bodeguita.”

When the sun sets it is time to move on. It is in the darkness of the night that Havana turns into the beautiful metropolis it once was, when Cuba was seething with energy. Prepare yourself for all the amusement that starts now. At Cabaret Tropicana the world famous cabaret with hundreds of dancers in sparkling costumes, sequins and rocking Caribbean rhythms has just started. Let yourself be carried away by the music, let yourself go in a passionate salsa or order an ice cold Cuba Libre at the bar. If you’re looking for something else, just find your way down to the promenade along the harbour that is miles and miles long and a given starting point for a fantastic night out. You will find there is expectation and excitement in the air. The sun has set again in Havana, and the night has just started.
Drawing from a past spent at the legendary Stockholm restaurants Trivå, Pontus! and Lydmar, Team Purfict possesses solid knowledge of how to make the perfect cocktail. Team Purfict’s Michael Bergström, Andreas Näslund and Joel Katzenstein have worked together behind the bar for many years. Now, they have been selected by Havana Club to share their experiences, inspire the curious and reveal how to make the most popular rum cocktails.

Michael: I would say the taste sensations, especially. I am also convinced that many will be inspired by the history of rum. There’s just so much that makes this spirit special, like the entire Cuban feeling of sun, music, creativity, dance and pirates.

Andreas: In order to make really good drinks you need to master the balance between the ingredients. It’s incredibly important, but rarely something that comes naturally. You have to learn it. Many people are familiar with cocktails like the Mojito and the Daiquiri, but few know how to prepare them properly and what a difference it actually makes if you do. In addition to practical knowledge, we also offer a lot of interesting trivia about the cocktails and the bars in Havana where the cocktails were invented.

Joel: The skills we teach are also very easy to apply at home, even though these cocktail sessions are quite specialized. But that’s just the point, that you will learn how to make truly wicked rum cocktails!

What is the best thing about rum cocktails?

Michael: The Mojito is fresh, invigorating, and the ultimate long drink. It is complex and yet universal, which makes most people appreciate it.

Joel: My favourite is the Daiquiri. If you know how to get the right balance, it is perfect. I like the simplicity with three straight flavours: alcohol, sweet and sour.

Where do you enjoy a cocktail? Can you name some really good bars?

Michael: Death & Co. in New York is my latest favourite. The name derives from an old propaganda poster against alcohol from the time of the alcohol ban in America in 1920-1933, known as the speakeasy or prohibition era. It is a fantastic and somewhat rough bar with a menu of small dishes that are world class. The bar also has a team of bartenders that work very well and passionately together.

Joel: I love Milk and Honey in New York. From the outside it looks more like a tailor than a bar, but they are actually very crafty in everything they do, from shaking the drinks to chopping their own ice. When you walk in, it feels like you are stepping into the 1920’s. The bar opened around 2000 and is by many considered to be the best bar in the world when it comes to cocktails.

What would you rather not have a bartender do with your drink?

Andreas: Skimp on the ice. Contrary to what you might think the cocktail gets more watery the less ice you put in. Throw in only three ice cubes and they melt right away, leaving you with a diluted drink that is lukewarm.

What trends do you see in the future?

Joel: The classic Daiquiri will probably become more popular in the near future. I would like to think that people learn to appreciate the classic drinks more. We try to push for it anyway. There is a trend in New York now where you build your drink on a molecular level, and that is the exact opposite of what I would like to see. I still want to drink my drinks - not eat them with knife and fork.

Michael: I think exotic cocktails will be the new trend. When I was in New York recently I spotted a lot of tiki stuff, Polynesian and fruit. It was really good though, and not in a tacky way.

Andreas: A trend that has lasted maybe ten years and is at its peak right now is the flirting with the Prohibition era. We will see more of that, I think. Bars oh here the drinks are in focus, places with smooth jazz where you may have to book a table just to drink. There are already a few quite good examples of that trend in Scandinavia.
Cuba's national spirit, Havana Club, is enjoyed all over the world, neat just as it is, perhaps with a cigar, but also as a base in the world's most popular cocktails.

The reason for its success is a proud and solid history. But there is one man that more than anyone has made Havana Club what it is today: the Master distiller and Chief blender – Maestro Ronero. The Maestro Ronero is the guardian of the Havana Club recipe. When time comes, he passes the knowledge on to the next head of Havana Club.

In order to call yourself Maestro Ronero you have to work as an apprentice for at least fifteen years. At that time you have learned to master the different elements within the making of Cuban rum. As part of his professional role, the Maestro Ronero must train his successor. It is a task of responsibility where he first has to find the right candidate and then ensure that all the secrets that generations of Maestro Roneros have accumulated through generations are passed on properly. Current Primer Maestro Ronero, Don José Navarro, has trained all Maestro Roneros since 1971. Thanks to him, connoisseurs can still enjoy Havana Club or order a traditional Mojito, Daiquiri or Cuba Libre.

The history of Cuban rum began on October 27, 1492, when a world famous explorer sighted the Cuban coast.

The Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus was fascinated by the beautiful island and decided to stay for a while. During his halt on Cuba, Columbus tried out Cuba's fertile soil by planting sugarcanes that he had brought from his trip to Asia. The warm and humid climate proved to be perfect for sugar cultivation and the production increased significantly over the centuries. Soon, the Cubans learned that the cane could be used for making alcohol.

In 1878, Spanish immigrant José Arechabala decided to try out a new recipe at his distillery in Santa Cruz del Norte, a small town located between Havana and the river Santa Cruz. He decided to name the new spirit Havana Club. The original flavour was a result of the quality of the sugarcanes, as well as in the complex distillation process where two alcohols were distilled, blended and aged. From the sugarcane extraction, José Arechabala obtained a beautiful dark nectar that was seductive in both colour and flavour. This nectar formed the basis of the Havana Club rum. Distillation was then made in columns made of copper where Aguardiente (max 75 percent alcohol) and Extra Fine Distillate (max 96 percent alcohol) were extracted. When the distillation was complete, José Arechabala blended the ingredients to give the rum a clear and defined character. Subsequently, the imperative ageing process could commence in large barrels of seasoned American oak, thus obtaining the characteristic flavour of Havana Club. The process of gradually storing, mixing and choosing the best rum became known as ‘Añejamiento’ and was so complex that it up until this day has to be carefully monitored by the Maestro Ronero.

José Arechabala's characteristic rum soon became popular amongst both Cubans and tourists. It tasted good, especially because of the unique process where the drink had aged in oak casks before bottling. The real breakthrough for Havana Club coincided with the increasing popularity of Havana bars, La Bodeguita del Medio and El Floridita. The bars in Havana started to serve the rum mixed with ingredients like sugar, lime, mint and soda water to famous guests like Ernest Hemingway, Frank Sinatra and Marlon Brando. Soon, the cocktails known as Mojito and Daiquiri were known all over the world as everyone wanted to drink Havana Club, just like the admired celebrities.
At world famous bar El Floridita in Havana the Daiquiri recipe is exactly the same as it was 100 years ago when the cocktail was invented. Due to the success one would think it was invented by a genius. But the classic cocktail is actually the result of a miscalculation.

The year was 1905 and a group of American engineers working for The Daiquiri Mining Company in Cuba was having American guests over. Just before their guests’ arrival someone discovered that they were out of gin. But instead of giving in, the engineers decided to improvise by mixing Cuban rum with lime for sourness and sugar to offset the lime taste. The drink was a success and so the classic Daiquiri was born.

The real breakthrough, however, came in the 1940s when the bartenders at El Floridita in Havana began to serve the drink to its colourful clientele of intellectuals and celebrities like Errol Flynn, Ava Gardner, Gary Cooper and John Wayne. Author Ernest Hemingway loved the atmosphere and the Daiquiris so much he even declared it was one of his favourite places in Cuba. And it was a mutual admiration. Hemingway was such a popular guest at El Floridita that when he won the Nobel Prize in literature 1954 the bar had a bust of him made and placed it above his favourite chair. Hemingway died seven years later, but at El Floridita his bust is still there for people to admire and maybe pronounce a toast to when drinking a Daiquiri the way Hemingway would have liked it.

El Floridita is also the birthplace of a beloved relative of the Daiquiri, known as the “Frozen Daiquiri”. Famous bartender Constantino Ribalaigua developed the cocktail during the 1920s, when he imported an automatic Ice Crushing Machine of the brand Flak Mark from the USA. The refreshing version of the classic Daiquiri was simple but brilliant with the addition of a few

Daiquiri Natural
- 5 cl Havana Club Añejo 3 Años
- 3 cl limejuice
- 2 cl sugar syrup

Mix all ingredients in a shaker and pour through a strainer.

“Maraschino is a sweet, turbid cherry liqueur with a taste of bitter almond. The liqueur is important as it adds character to the drink, but it can be hard to find in stores. Therefore we recommend limejuice and sugar syrup to balance the drink. Everyone has different preferences, so feel free to try out the proportions that suits you.”

Daiquiri

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drops of Maraschino liqueur and lots of crushed ice. Perhaps it was the colours, perhaps the fruity flavour and texture. But this much is certain: Constantino Ribalaigua’s version of the Daiquiri has become a classic on its own merits.

But the classic Daiquiri is still a main number at bar El Floridita. In part because of the inherited skills of the bartenders, partly thanks to the ingredients. The sugar is drawn from any of the many sugarcane plantations in Cuba. Naturally, other kinds of sugar may be used, like white refined sugar, but the bartenders in Cuba have the privilege of working with locally grown ingredients.

Since sugar is not easily dissolved in cold liquid, a syrup is prepared by bringing equal parts of water and granulated sugar to a slow boil until it has a dense texture. The syrup is then easily mixed with Havana Club Añejo Blanco and limejuice in a shaker before being strained into a cocktail glass and garnished with a slice of lime. It only takes a minute for the experienced bartenders at El Floridita to mix a classic Daiquiri, but the enjoyment is long lasting. Even today, tourists pilgrimage to El Floridita to soak up the atmosphere and a little bit of the bar’s history. But above all, visitors come here for the very best Daiquiri in the world.

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Frozen Strawberry Daiquiri

- 5 cl Havana Club Añejo 3 Años
- 3 cl limejuice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 5 strawberries

Cut the strawberries into small pieces and mix them with Havana Club, limejuice and sugar syrup. Fill up with crushed ice, until the fluid is covered. When mixed, pour into a glass on foot (Daiquiri glass). Garnish with a strawberry.
Frozen Mango Daiquiri
- 5 cl Havana Club Anejo 3 Años
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 1/4 of a mango

Cut the mango into small pieces and add all ingredients in a blender. Fill up with crushed ice until the fluid is covered. Mix and pour into a glass on foot (Daiquiri glass). Garnish with a mango slice.

Frozen Peach Daiquiri
- 5 cl Havana Club Anejo 3 Años
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 1/4 of a peach

Cut the peach into small pieces and pour all the ingredients in a blender. Fill up with crushed ice until the fluid is covered. Mix and pour into a glass on foot (Daiquiri glass). Garnish with a peach slice.

Frozen Raspberry Daiquiri
- 5 cl Havana Club Anejo 3 Años
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 6-8 raspberries

Add all ingredients into a blender and fill up with ice until the fluid is covered. Mix and pour into a glass on foot (Daiquiri glass). Garnish with a couple of raspberries.

“It can be hard to estimate the amount of ice for a “frozen” drink. Therefore it’s better to start off with a smaller amount and then add gradually as you blend or mix the drink.”

“If you put too much ice in a “frozen” drink it might become too thick. It can also be hard to get it out of the blender and into the glass as a drink with too much ice has a tendency to stick.”
"Most fruits and berries can be used in a Frozen Daiquiri. Just keep in mind that the sweetness varies with different fruits and berries..."

**Frozen Melon Daiquiri**
- 5 cl Havana Club Anejo 3 Años
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 1 thick slice of melon without seeds (Cantaloupe).

Cut the melon into small pieces and put all ingredients in a blender. Fill up with crushed ice until the fluid is covered. Mix and pour into a glass on foot (Daiquiri glass). Garnish with a slice of melon.

**Frozen Daiquiri Natural**
- 5 cl Havana Club Anejo 3 Años
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup

Pour all ingredients into a blender and fill up with ice until it covers the liquid. Mix and pour into a glass on foot (Daiquiri glass). Garnish with a lime slice.

For that reason you might want to add more or cut down on the amount of sugar syrup to get the perfect taste."
It is an early evening in Havana in 1958. At the bar El Floridita a man dressed in a pair of worn-out jeans, a plaid shirt and a baseball cap orders a Papa Doble. He gets his drink and settles down in his favourite chair. Another man walks in and lights up in a grin. “Papa!” he calls out and the man at the bar turns around. Papa is his nickname. His real name is Ernest Hemingway. For almost 30 years now, he has lived here, in Cuba. But in a year’s time, he will be forced to leave. But this he doesn’t know yet, as he’s sipping on his Papa Doble while his best friend Gregorio Fuentes happily calls out “Papa!”.

Author Ernest Hemingway came to Cuba for the first time in 1928 with his second wife Pauline Pfeiffer, and their two sons. It was a short visit, but it was long enough for Hemingway to fall in love with Cuba and the people he met. It wasn’t long before he returned—alone. Room nr 511 at Hotel Ambos Mundos in Havana became Hemingway’s home. Except for a break during the Spanish Civil War when he went to report from the front, this was where he would spend his time writing.

Although his new girlfriend, journalist Martha Gellhorn, liked Cuba she wasn’t too impressed by Hemingway’s messy hotel room. They soon moved to a house called Finca Vigía a short drive from Havana. Although Hemingway liked his new home he could not break it off with Havana’s vivid bars where the drinks tasted so good and where he, despite his celebrity status, could remain anonymous. He loved to drink Mojitos at the bar La Bodequita del Medio and Daiquiris at El Floridita without being recognized. The Cuban way of life suited him. He loved the spontaneity and the way the Cubans lived for the day. Of course, Hemingway also loved the Cuban rum. He loved it so much that he wrote: “My Mojito in La Bodequita, my Daiquiri in El Floridita”.

Hemingway’s constant bar crawling soon put an end to his relationship with Martha Gellhorn. After the breakup he began spending more time with his dear Cuban friend Gregorio Fuentes. In Fuentes he had found a comradeship and shared interests that none of his wives could ever have competed with. Like submarine hunting. For a few months during World War II the two friends devoted themselves to hunting war enemies at sea. Under the codename Papa, Hemingway chased submarines with his friend and his fishing boat Pilar up and down the coast. It was a serious endeavour. The wooden boat was equipped with automatic weapons and grenades. It also had sufficient radio equipment installed onboard, in order for them to contact the U.S. fleet should they manage to identify a German submarine. They never did. Maybe it was for the best—the wooden boat Pilar would never had stood a chance in a real combat situation.

Ernest Hemingway

All it took was a brief visit to Havana in 1928 for Ernest Hemingway to fall in love. The city became his haven, where he could engage in all the good things in life while he was writing his world famous novels.
After the war was over, Hemingway turned to a new hobby. He started spending his days fishing and hunting, something his fourth wife, Mary Welsh, wasn’t happy with at all. Their marriage was stormy and the bars of Havana continued to serve as his second home. But this time it would also affect his health. Hemingway feared that he was suffering from diabetes and his biggest concern was how he would be able to continue drinking the tasty but very sweet Daiquiris. The sympathetic bartenders at his favourite bar El Floridita solved the concern. They created a Hemingway Special for him, which became known under his codename Papa Doble. It contained less sugar and a double measure of rum.

In 1960, Hemingway moved back to America and settled down in the small town of Ketchum, Idaho. He missed the people, the climate and the bars of Havana more than he ever would have imagined. Cuba had provided him with the inspiration he had needed to write The Old Man and the Sea, a novel that had earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. He had donated the entire prize sum to his beloved Cuba, even though he had known that the 30-year-old love story was about to end. The love affair between Hemingway and Cuba had been genuine and mutual and more than five decades after his death the Cubans still drink Papa Doble in his honour.

**Papa Doble**

- 4 cl Havana Club Anejo 3 Años
- 1 cl Maraschino
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 4 cl red grapefruit juice

Mix all ingredients in a shaker and strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with a maraschino cherry.
It all started in the 1920s on the beach Playa de Mariano where Cuban workers came to hang out after work. Sweaty and thirsty after a hard day’s work, they liked to put out the thirst with ice-cold cocktails with rum and mint. The sour taste of the lime worked as an excellent quencher when the sun was blazing while the Cuban mint added a cooling and refreshing touch. It was not glamorous, nor trendy. But the drink served its purpose and added some relief for dry throats.

But the drink showed up again in the 1940s when one of Havana’s most legendary bars, La Bodequita del Medio, started serving it to regulars like author Ernest Hemingway, actor Errol Flynn and singer Nat King Cole. Soon, the drink had become an event in itself, where world celebrities would crowd together in the bohemian bar – packed with exciting artefacts and the walls scribbled with autographs – to get their hands on what was to become known as the Mojito. It was the mix of light rum, the mint, the sweetness and the sour lime that once attracted the tired Cuban workers that now suddenly had enchanted the cultural elite. The rest of the world, naturally, grew interested in the popular cocktail.

The bartenders at La Bodequita del Medio still make the Mojito with the same precision as they did in the 1940s. That’s the reason for thousands of visitors to flock to the fabled bar on Calle Empedrado to enjoy the cocktail that tastes the same today as it did in Hemingway’s, Flynn’s and Cole’s time.

“There are many ways to prepare a Mojito, but if you want to drink it the way Hemingway liked it you should follow the recipe that was invented in Havana some ninety years ago.

The easiest way to prepare sugar syrup is to bring equal parts of water and granulated sugar to a slow boil until it has a dense texture. Make sure the sugar dissolves. If not, it will sink to the bottom and get stuck to the pan.”
“Many people believe a Mojito should be prepared with crushed ice. But the truth is, crushed ice melts faster. If you want to prepare your Mojito the way they do it at La Bodeguita del Medio in Cuba, you should use ice cubes instead of crushed ice.”
**Six easy steps to make a classic Mojito:**

1. Put mint and sugar syrup in a highball glass.
2. Carefully muddle the mint in the sugar syrup with a wooden muddle or a pestle.
3. Squeeze fresh lime into the glass.
4. Add Havana Club.
5. Fill up with ice.
6. Top off with soda and stir.

“Be careful not to pound the mint too hard when you make your Mojito, you do not wish to get the bitterness from the mint leaves, but only the cool and refreshing flavour that is so typical of the Mojito.”

**Mojito**

- 5 cl Havana Club Añejo Blanco
- 3 cl lime juice
- 2 cl sugar syrup
- 6-8 mint leaves
- Soda water

Pound the mint lightly together with the sugar syrup in the bottom of a highball glass. Add lime juice and rum and fill up with ice cubes. Top with soda and stir. Garnish with a mint twig.
Famous Hotel Nacional de Cuba is saturated with glamour. The walls in the lobby are decorated with numerous portraits of famous movie stars, politicians and royalties, all of them visitors at the hotel at one time or another. But few people know what actually took place at the top floor of the hotel in December 1946.

Located on the harbour promenade, the palatial white building with its two towers and the large penthouse suites offers a spectacular view of Havana and the Caribbean Sea. In the 1940s, the impressive Hotel Nacional de Cuba was the pride of Havana. So maybe it is no surprise that it was here, in one of the suites on the top floor, that thirty members of the American mafia gathered for a meeting that would change the history of Cuba. The meeting that started on December 22, 1946 lasted for four days and would go down to history as the Havana Conference.

The prelude to the conference was that two American mafia bosses – Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky – shared a dream of one day controlling a country of their own, where they could run casinos without any intervention from the government. Cuba seemed like the perfect place to realize the dream. And the prerequisites were perfect. Lansky was already part owner of Hotel Nacional de Cuba, the most luxurious hotel in the country with a casino that attracted celebrities from around the globe. Every night, world-class artists like Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole would perform in the hotel’s nightclub. And the money from the business made its way directly into the pockets of Lansky. By making Luciano co-owner, it would mean the possibility to expand. But to be included in the business, Luciano would need to cough up 150,000 dollars. Lansky solved the problem. He invited the most influential mafia bosses in the United States to a conference at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. The official reason for the meeting was a gala where Frank Sinatra would perform. Lansky and Luciano even flew Frank Sinatra to Havana so that he could perform for the mafia members, on the night of the 22 December 1946 at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. But once the lights went out after the show, the thirty mafia members retreated to one of the suites on the top floor in one of the hotel towers. They pulled the curtains and placed themselves comfortably in the large sofas. They sat for four days while Lansky and Luciano presented their plans to take control of all casino operations on Cuba and thus have all the power – from the bottom to the top. None of the thirty mafia members doubted for a second that Lansky’s and Luciano’s plans were feasible and they all pitched in with their fair share of the money needed for Luciano to buy himself into the business of the hotel and its casino.

As soon as the conference was over the plan was in the works. Within a few years, Havana boomed with activity, and money flowed into the casino hotels. Mostly into the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. When the winds of revolution raked in over Havana, Lansky and Luciano responded with more luxurious casinos and even more stars performing at the bars of the hotels. But the dream came to an abrupt end on New Year’s Eve 1958-59, when young Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro and his men began to protest against what they viewed as a corrupt government.

Castro closed the casino at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, but it remained a hotel for diplomats during the revolution. Today, Hotel Nacional de Cuba is a shining memory of the past. Hostels of visitors come here to enjoy the ancient glory and follow the traces of the legendary mafia bosses and the secret Havana Conference that changed the course of history.
Nacional de Cuba

- 7,5 cl Havana Club Añejo Reserva
- 2 tbs raw cane sugar
- 1,5 cl Apricot brandy
- 1/2 lime

Cut the lime in small pieces and pound them together with the raw cane sugar at the bottom of a tumbler or a low whiskey glass. Pour in the rum; fill up with crushed ice and stir. Top up with more crushed ice and apricot brandy.
The origin of the Cuba Libre cocktail is debated. According to one tale, it was invented after a war in the late 1800’s when a group of soldiers from an American troop gathered in a bar in the old part of Havana. The captain ordered a drink with rum, Coca-Cola, ice and a wedge of lime, and then proposed a toast to Cuba’s liberation – “Por Cuba Libre!” The soldiers raised their glasses and replied “Cuba Libre!” It’s a nice story, but true? The popular American soda Coca-Cola was officially not exported to Cuba until 1900. This means that this story takes place too early.

According to another story, Cuba Libre was invented in May 1902 at the hotel La Florida in Havana in order to celebrate Cuba’s independence after three years of American military rule. This was two years after Coca-Cola came to Cuba, making it quite possible that ice-cold glasses of Havana Club and Coca-Cola were served to celebrating politicians and diplomats working in Havana. Was the drink really invented there and then? Questions remain, but the biggest one is perhaps how the hardworking couple Havana Club and Coca-Cola has managed to stay together throughout history.

The relationship between Cuba and the U.S. has been strained since Castro’s revolution in 1959. Not only did the U.S. impose a ban on imports of Cuban sugar in June 1960. Up until this day Americans can’t travel to Cuba, nor can they buy the famous Cuban cigar legally within the borders of the U.S. But the good relationship between Havana Club and Coca-Cola has been unaffected by politics over the years, and the drink has even travelled around the globe, to reunite in other countries and continents. There have been variations on the way. In Venezuela the drink is called Cuba Libre Preparado and has also, besides rum and Coca-Cola, a splash of gin and some bitter in it.

Cuba Libre is easy to make. With the four ingredients Havana Club, Coca-Cola, a wedge of lime, and ice, it takes only a minute before you have the drink in your hand. But the most refreshing Cuba Libre is still to be found in Havana. There, the cold from the glass cools extra well in the hot Cuban sun, and the knowledge that the domestic rum is made with pride and tradition makes it taste even better.

Should you ever find yourself in sunny Havana, please make your way down to Malecón, the popular seaside promenade that frames parts of the city. Sit down at a bar, enjoy the sea breeze that smells of salt and sun and order a Cuba Libre. And by the way, the wedge of lime is there to determine how much lime you wish to flavour your drink with. It is for you to experiment with freely, Cuba Libre!
Cuba Libre

- 5 cl Havana Club Añejo Reserva
- Coca Cola

Pour rum into a highball glass with ice and fill up with Coca Cola. Garnish with a wedge of lime.

“If you feel that your Cuba Libre is a little too sweet, you may squeeze the wedge of lime that your drink is garnished with, to add a bit more sourness.”

Havana Club, Cuban Rum According to the Original Recipe of 1878.

Añejo Blanco.
A light and aromatic rum rich in flavour with mellow, sun-coloured tones and the fruity flavour of freshly pressed sugarcane. It is ideal as a base in Cuban classics such as Cuba’s own national drink, the Mojito.

Añejo 3 Años.
Three years of ageing in white oak barrels gives a light blend to this rum with a pleasant palate of arrack, vanilla and cocoa notes. It is highly recommended in cocktails where an extra rum character and fullness is desired – the Daiquiri is a brilliant example.

Añejo Especial.
The premium golden rum combines the lightness of white rums and the robust aroma of dark rums. It has an intense aroma, reminiscent of sugarcane with slightly smoky accents and hints of honey, vanilla and cinnamon.

Añejo Reserva.
This strongly flavoured rum is a perfect example of the exceptional smoothness of Cuban blended rums, combining a powerful taste with a light aroma. It has a lasting aroma of cocoa, coffee, tobacco and spices and is best enjoyed as it is or in a Cuba Libre.

Añejo 7 Años.
The very essence of aged Cuban rum has a complex palate of vibrant and refined warm cocoa, vanilla, sugarcane, chestnut and caramelised tropical fruit flavours. To be enjoyed as a digestive along with a piece of dark chocolate or with its Cuban brother – the Havana cigar.

Máximo Extra Añejo.
A unique and ultra-premium rum made by blending the finest and oldest rum reserves. It is robust with a cascade of savors accented by dark chocolate, luxurious dried fruits and a hint of vanilla. It impresses with an unparalleled complexity, graceful maturity, and balanced notes of oak, smokiness, and subtle tones of fresh pear, coconut and dried fruit.
Havana is a city like no other. A city where there is no young or old. No generation gap. Talking. Shouting. Loving. Dancing. It is a city where the inhabitants express spontaneity and passion with generosity. Every moment of every day.