

# CUBA: A COUNTRY OF MINIMALISM

CJ Andrews





¡Bienvenido a Cuba! Throughout my travels through Havana and beyond, I have noticed that many Cubans possess a minimalist mindset that instead of being focused on material things, is focused on the relationships with the people around them. This can clearly be seen through this picture of a conversation between a group of friends. I met these kind people one afternoon and they were interested in how me and the friends with me were enjoying Cuba. The man told me about his son who works at the Havana cruise ship port. I could quickly see just how connected these people felt to each other and their families. They loved talking and laughing with every person who passed by.





Currently, the country is under an embargo by the United States. This has resulted in shortages of various products across the country, such as the current chicken shortage. Markets like this one sometimes run out of important products but Cubans are able to make do with what they have. In the restaurants I visited, they would sometimes run out of certain ingredients but they would continue to prepare their dishes through substitution of ingredients. This is an example of how Cubans know how to make the best of what they have.



Here, this taxi driver sat before a line of Cubans waiting patiently to get into a market to buy their families food. In the United States, people often fight over bread and milk when there is a small blizzard. In comparison, these people wait calmly to enter the grocery store even though their markets may run out of the products they need. The taxi driver in the front too waits patiently for a customer. This photo captures the hardworking nature and kind spirit of this man, who was more than willing to have his picture taken when I told him it was "para escuela". Taxi drivers may be trying to make a living, but in the end, they share the same warm spirit of the Cuban people.



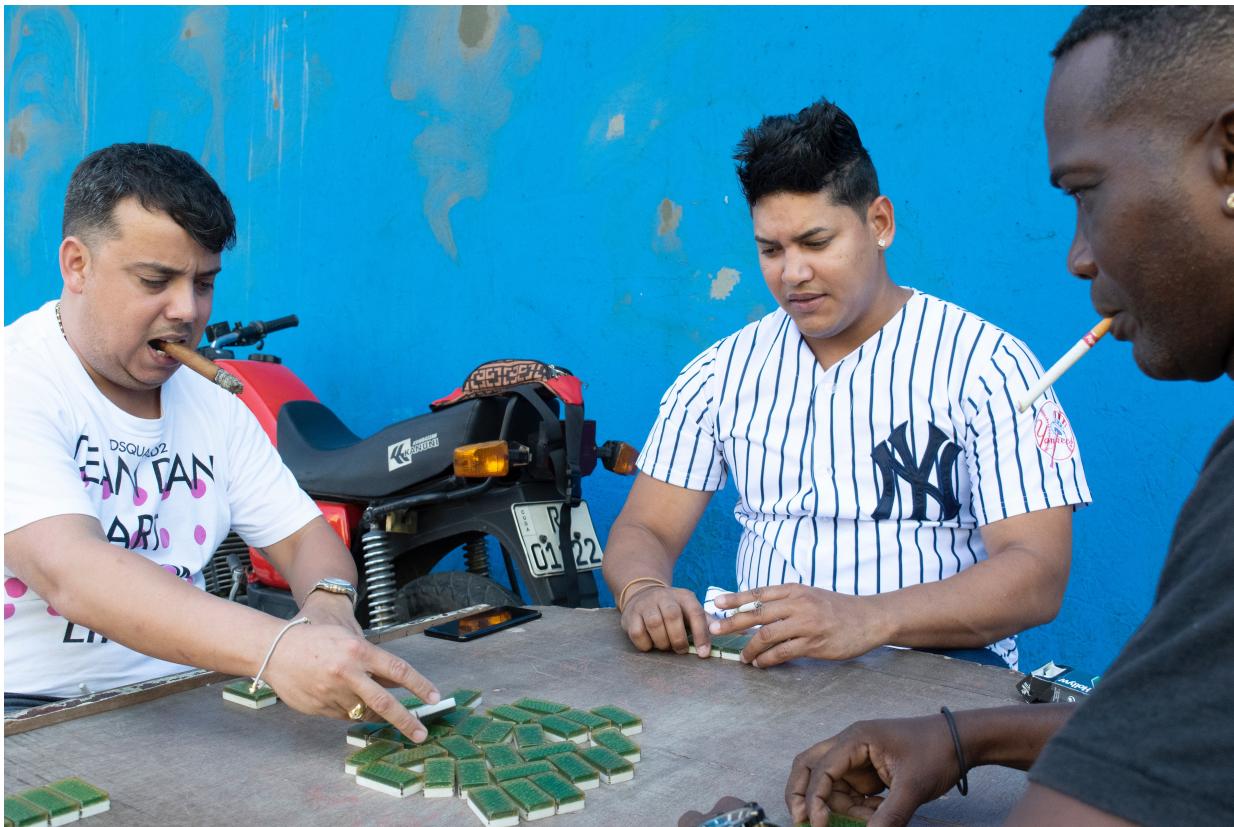
- When walking through Matanzas and Havana, I often noticed that workers had close bonds with each other. They worked side by side, as evidenced in these photos, sometimes laughing through some rigorous work they had to complete. It seemed like there was less competition amongst workers, especially amongst taxi drivers, like the ones on the right. Instead of fighting for customers to choose their cab over another, they seemed to work together to secure clients. Even on the job, they valued friendship over profit.





Street art lines the streets of Havana, especially on the Malecón. Artists from across the city produce their art for locals and tourists alike to enjoy as they stroll down the streets with friends. The amount of art in the city shows just how much Cubans value their culture and identity. Many artists use basic tools and materials to create breathtaking works of art.





- Kids and adults alike are always outside playing along the streets and enjoying a little friendly competition. Dominoes is a very popular game amongst the older crowd, while children can be found playing soccer or doing handstands, like the girl on the right. Children do not need expensive toys or iPads to entertain themselves. The girls in the right photo played amongst bricks, focused on each other instead of their surroundings.



Due to limits on WIFI accessibility and their culture, Cubans are less attached to their phones. It encourages them to talk to the people in front of them instead of scrolling on Instagram and missing the chance to connect with people around them.





While walking down the streets, I quickly noticed that the locals were extremely close with their neighbors and their community. Everyone talked to everyone and there seemed to be little class or race divisions, as demonstrated by this photo. People appreciate each other for their personalities and are always looking to make a new friend. Not only are they welcoming to their own people, but they are very friendly to travelers and are always looking to strike up a conversation.



- Not only are Cubans welcoming to all people but also to the strays of their cities. Store owners will often allow animals, like this dog and cat, to take shelter under their awnings or in their building to allow them to rest away from the sun. Locals coexist happily with the dogs and cats of Havana. They do not mind sharing their spaces with a stray and love to see people and animals alike happy.





In this photo, this couple seems to only have eyes for each other. As you walk down the streets, you see couples holding hands and commuting through their city together. Love is the most important part of their lives, not their processions.





Cubans young and old stand together everyday celebrating their Cubanity. Their minimalistic way of life encourages the development of stronger relationships with their community. This leads to happier and more fulfilling lives. In comparison, the materialism that many modern countries are facing seems to lead to increased stress and depression. I think the biggest thing I learned during my three weeks here is that Cubans have what they need, and that is each other.

