



Friday, December 24, 2004

Write and cycle in Cuba

Toronto travel leader Mark Franklin has teamed up with travel writer Julia Steinecke to offer a new, two-track way to experience Cuba. A new trip they're calling "Cuba in Parallel" combines Franklin's off-the-beaten-path recreational cycling and walking with Steinecke's "Cuba Creative" writing workshop.

"It's a mix-and-match opportunity, ideal for anyone wanting an alternative to a week at the beach; and it's especially suited to couples," says Franklin.

"Sometimes one member of a couple is more interested in the activity, and the other person comes along for the ride. Now, people can choose how they want to spend their day, either actively exploring by bike, or, more introspectively, walking and writing."

The program, planned and led by a Cuban as well as the two Canadians, explores Cuba's culture and offers a look at the lives of Cuban people as well as the beauty of the country's nature and architecture. The itinerary offers alternatives.

"Those who want to spend the day on the 'Cuba Creative' track can participate in creativity exercises and writing workshops," says Steinecke.

"Participants will soak up the sights and sounds of a vibrant Cuban seaside town while they kick-start a novel, leap into travel writing, polish their poetry, or spice up their journalling. Open to beginning and experienced writers, the program includes optional daytrips."

Those choosing to cycle will see a microcosm of Cuba from the seats of their bikes. The pace is easy-going, with plenty of rest stops.

Travellers will stay with local families in licensed Casas Particulares (similar to B&Bs) and enjoy typical Cuban meals in local private enterprise restaurants known as paladares. "Cuba in Parallel" goes Feb. 26 to March 4 and costs \$1,650 for cyclists, \$1,695 for writers (who get private rooms), including taxes, airfare from Toronto to Havana return, accommodation, some meals, ground transportation and admissions.

For more information, see www.careercycles.com or call Mark Franklin at 1-416-465 9183 or Julia Steinecke at 1-416-406-1747.

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