

The produce on this island is always organic, fresh and delicious. When I commented about the importance of growing and eating organic, our guide informed us that farming organically was not a choice but a necessity because the cost of fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides are prohibitively expensive. Growing organic is cheaper than using chemicals in farming. Fruits and vegetables are only eaten in season. Pineapple, guava and bananas are the sweetest I've ever tasted anywhere. In Havana, carts of tomatoes, peppers, lettuces, beets, bananas and cucumbers are pushed through the streets, offering a daily rolling farmer's market to the populace.

Nature is what attracted me to Cuba and it didn't disappoint. After hiking, biking, snorkeling, kayaking, bird watching, horseback riding and examining the flora and fauna of the island, it was the people that stole my heart. They have so little economically speaking, yet they are joyful, full of life, and welcoming to Americans. In the casa particulares where we stayed, tiny Christmas trees or frayed holiday trinkets brightened the small rooms where families gathered, a far cry from the Disneyesque Christmas spectacle I'm accustomed to in my family. Speaking Spanish to several Cubans, I learned of dreams to travel and hopes for a freer future.

Not many Americans have had the opportunity to visit this impoverished, yet beautiful Caribbean nation. If you are one of those individuals who want to see what few have seen, consider supporting the Cuban people. You'll be rewarded with a visit of joy, diversity, and plenty of grateful hugs!



*A happy coleus is bright and pink.*



*The fruit of the Cuban Royal Palm is a favorite of birds.*



*The glorybower vine in bloom in Cienfuegos, Cuba.*