
A "Showcase" for the Guayabera

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A traditional ranch of Sancti Spíritus city treasures a collection of Guayaberas that includes pieces of outstanding personalities of politics, art and sports... we paid a visit.

Santa Elena Ranch seats by the banks of Yayabo River, very close to the famous bridge. Everybody knows the bridge and river are Sancti Spíritus's main symbols, one of the first Cuban villages. In this place welcomes for some years now one of the most popular and visited cultural centers of the city: the Guayabera House, dedicated to the promotion of a garment that identifies Cuba around the world, some even assure it was born in this area.

We won't enter the debate. The "paternity" has been granted to a few, here and abroad. But the truth is that so far the guayabera is already an unquestionable part of our cultural identity. It is the "going out" clothes of "peasants" (some of them anyway, since it's difficult to find many differences between the ways of the city and those of the countryside) and the piece of clothes by excellence of protocol.

The House treasures the most important guayabera collection in Cuba... and probably of the world. Not only for the variety of designs and quality of the pieces exhibited, but by the relevance of the personalities the guayaberas belonged to. Just to mention a few names: there are guayaberas of Fidel and Raúl Castro, Gabriel García Márquez, Hugo Chávez, Alicia Alonso, Vilma Espín, Juan Almeida, Danny Glover, Miguel Barnet...

Some are exhibited at the center of the exhibition room. But the most representative pieces (which are also the most popular) already have permanent showcases.

All guayaberas are different: the "spectrum" of the fabrics, the colors, the designs, the tucks... is really wide. But the greatest distinction is the history they "tell". The guayabera worn by Fidel, for example, he wore it at the Ibero-American Summit of Cartagena de Indias, in Colombia, 1994.

The Guayaberas of Raúl, Fidel, and Juan Almeida.

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It was a surprise for the world. Everyone expected the Cuban president appear with his traditional army uniform, but responding to a request of organizers, Fidel agreed to use a guayabera. No president was so photographed at that summit. That was the garment he used to go in a car ride with his great friend Gabriel García Márquez.

On display there is the guayabera worn by Alicia Alonso, Cuba's prima ballerina in the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the Cuban National Ballet, in 1978. Raul Castro's guayabera a gift from Vilma, for his birthday...

Visitors have the chance to listen these and other stories. They can observe every piece. The collection is large, the exhibition is renewed every so often. On top of all that, they can appreciate the making process, because a tailor works in one of the rooms.

The largest Guayabera and some of the tiniest.

Carlo Figueroa the director (a known media man who have dedicated many years to the Guayabera House), he doesn't believe this House is a museum. "It's a cultural center, with a patrimonial exhibition. Our intentions have always been to welcome a varied programme: exhibitions, concerts, fairs, presentations... Taking advantage of the excellent location, the beautiful view. Here we have options for everyone."

The Guayabera House is today a reference of the culture of Sancti Spíritus. One of the must-see places for those who arrive to this beautiful city of the island center.

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