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Nearly sixty years of political isolation have preserved some of the most spectacular landscapes in the Caribbean.

Cuba Today

On the big, blue horizon a new chapter in Cuban history is being written. The death of long-time leader Fidel Castro has put the island into twin moods of reflection and anticipation. Meanwhile, his brother, President Raúl Castro, has dedicated his tenure to balancing party ideology with reforms to restore economic health. This has meant green-lighting business start-ups, Internet access, travel abroad, and the right to sell homes. In no time, Cuba's window on the world has expanded exponentially.

Best on Film

Four Seasons in Havana (Félix Viscarret; 2016) Netflix mini-series based on the acclaimed detective series by Leonardo Padura.

Che: The Argentine (Steven Soderbergh; 2008) First part of the classic biopic focuses on Che's Cuban years.

Before Night Falls (Julian Schnabel; 2000) The life and struggles of Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas.

Fresa y Chocolate (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; 1993) Marries the improbable themes of homosexuality and communism.

El Ojo del Canario (Fernando Pérez; 2010) This atmospheric biopic of José Martí earned numerous Latin film awards.

Best in Print

Our Man in Havana (Graham Greene; 1958) Lampoons both the British Secret Service and Batista's corrupt regime.

Cuba and the Night (Pico Iyer; 1995) The most evocative book about Cuba ever written by a foreigner.

Dirty Havana Trilogy (Pedro Juan Gutiérrez; 2002) Dirty, itchy study of life and sex in Havana during the Special Period.

Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life (Jon Lee Anderson; 1997) Anderson's meticulous research helped unearth Che's remains in Bolivia.

New Chapter in US–Cuba Relations

Cuba's tentative rapprochement with the United States gained traction when the two countries brokered a prisoner swap in 2014. On December 17, 2014, Barack Obama appeared on television to announce the most significant thaw in US–Cuban relations in 54 years, measures that included US telecommunications aid to Cuba, the authorization of American credit and debit cards, a gentle easing of US travel restrictions, and – most importantly – the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries for the first time since 1961.

In July 2015, the US and Cuba reopened their respective embassies in Havana and Washington. In May of 2016, Obama became the first sitting president to visit Cuba since the 1959 revolution, meeting with entrepreneurs, Cuban dissidents and President Raul Castro. Whether the thaw will confine the embargo to the history books is hard to predict, but President Obama unequivocally opened up a new chapter in US–Cuba relations.

Yet ending the embargo requires US Congressional approval still pending under the Trump administration. Despite strong pockets of resistance in the Senate and House of Representatives, polls suggest that a majority of Americans and an increasing number of Cuban-Americans want the embargo to end. However, with an unpredictable new administration and a solid block of long-established Cuban exiles still determined not to negotiate, it could be a tough political fight.

New Class of Entrepreneurs

It's not quite democratic socialism, but the 2011–15 reforms have helped unleash the creativity and entrepreneurship of a generation of economically stifled Cubans. Private business has rocketed in numerous trades, especially for those with ready access to hard currency,