

Contact: Nancy Malmed
215-849-7950
nmalmed@verizon.net

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CUBA BALLET TRIP - Havana - a City Lost in Time

Eight lucky students and two teachers of Wissahickon Dance Academy (WDA) studied at the National Ballet of Cuba this past July. Director Nancy Malmed organized the ballet study trip after visiting Cuba last year and had the opportunity to observe students of the National Ballet. She made contact with the director of their international summer program. The WDA students accompanying her on the trip were: Coralie Francois (Wyncote), Rosa Mykyta Chomsky, Grace Jickling, Cynthia Jickling (Germantown), Michaela Drust (East Falls), Marielle Issa (Chestnut Hill), Margaret Mushi (Bryn Mawr) Brianna Mims and Ginger Sable (Florida). Both Brianna and Ginger are former students of WDA.

The ballet program, although based on the Russian Vaganova technique, was very different from Russian based classes in the USA. The Cubans place a lot of focus on physical conditioning, stressing core strength and flexibility. Their program included daily ballet technique, pointe, variations, physical conditioning and Cuban popular dances. The Cuban teachers loved the WDA students, giving them oodles of attention. Their classmates came from Cuba, Honduras, Venezuela, Paraguay, Mexico and Canada. In addition, there were 10 adult chaperones who accompanied the group. The group had the opportunity to tour Havana and surrounding areas after ballet classes in the afternoon and weekends. They saw historical sites, toured old Havana, visited an eco-farm and eco-village, attended an amazing performance by the National Ballet, saw a circus, went to the beach, connected with the wonderful people of Havana and lots more. The adults, not in the ballet program, had tours organized for them while the students were in class. They saw a rehearsal for an opera, visited several markets, met with two former diplomats who discussed their view of present Cuban economics and relations with the US, visited apartments for sale, and much more.

The city is amazingly safe and the people are happy. It doesn't seem to bother them that the buildings are deteriorating, and the streets and sidewalks are in disrepair. The streets are loaded with vehicles from the 1940's and 50's; the people fabricating their own parts for these cars. All in all, it was a trip to remember. Cuba keeps calling us back.

Photo Caption: WDA students and teacher at a performance of the National Ballet of Cuba, in Havana. From left to right: Nancy Malmed, Cynthia Jickling, Brianna Mimms, Michaela Drust, Marielle Issa, Rosa Mykyta-Chomsky, Coralie Francois, Margaret Mushi and Grace Jickling