

Author A.C. Frieden Researches New Novel in Havana, Cuba

HAVANA, Cuba (July 4, 2012) – Thriller author A.C. Frieden arrived in Havana, Cuba, today for a four-day visit aimed in part at researching scenes for an new novel set in the Cuban capital. “I’ve always wanted to include Havana--the city, the culture, the people, the unique history, the political scene--into one of my novels,” said Frieden. “But, like all my writings, I only add places that I have personally seen and researched. Today, I finally see Cuba with my own eyes, and it’s well worth it.”



(above) Novelist A.C. Frieden at an old mansion in the Miramar neighborhood of Havana; (below) The view from Frieden’s room at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba of Havana’s downtown Vedado neighborhood, including the United States Interests Section complex along the waterfront Malecón (far right).



With a population of 2.1 million, Havana serves as the capital of Cuba and as a major port, commercial center and historical epicenter of a political movement that reverberates well beyond the borders of this island nation. Havana was established by the Spanish in the 1500s, and various palaces, fortresses, churches and other landmarks from the period remain today. The Spanish added numerous fortifications to the city, including the Fortress of San Carlos de la Cabaña, one of the largest in the New World. Spain lost the island following the Spanish-American War, a conflict that began with the sinking of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in the city's harbor in 1898--an act many believe was perpetrated by the U.S. government to provide a pretext for the strategic conquests that followed. Today, Havana has three distinct parts: Old Havana (*Habana Vieja*), Vedado, and the newer suburban districts, including Miramar, an area filled with diplomatic compounds.



(above left) A.C. Frieden in front of the “Granma”, the 60-foot boat that took Fidel Castro and eighty other rebels to the shores of Cuba in 1956 to begin the revolution that overthrew the regime of dictator Fulgencio Batista; *(above right)* The United States Interests Section complex along the waterfront Malecón.

Travel restrictions for Americans have been loosened in recent years, but it is still not sufficient to allow most Americans to enter legally. Consequently, only a fraction of U.S. travelers--including A.C. Frieden--are able to visit the island with proper authorization from the U.S. State Department. However, Cuba enjoys over a million tourists annually from other nations, which provides the needed source of foreign currency. This foreign income has helped sustain the difficult economic conditions that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent end to billions of dollars of subsidies. Fortunately for Raúl Castro's regime, Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez has in recent years given substantial economic aid to the island nation, including oil at below-market prices. “Without Chavez's support, it's hard to imagine how Cuba could maintain its controlled economy and weather the global economic downturn,” said Frieden.



(above) Security forces pass by a revolutionary billboard along Avenida 23, in downtown Havana.

Frieden spent much of his time in Old Havana, looking for locations that could be used in several scenes of an upcoming novel. "While I was free to move about the city, visit sites, and take as many pictures as I wanted," Frieden said, "I was never under the illusion that Havana is in any way a free society. It is not. Not politically, and not economically--only recently has there been some liberalization of the official economy, which should not to be confused with the underground economy, which is thriving." Surprisingly, however, Frieden was given unique access to some political activists, who have in recent years cautiously pushed the regime's level of tolerance for dissent. "There is a strong desire for change among the Cubans I spoke, but what that change will be frightens many of them," added Frieden. "And it is this unknown that makes some less eager to weaken the current government; while a minority of dissidents are seeking more dramatic change."



(above left) A.C. Frieden in front of El Capitolio, the seat of the Cuban government until 1959, and which now houses the Cuban Academy of Sciences, a library, and other administrative offices; **(above right)** An old car parked in front of the famous Hotel Nacional de Cuba.



(above left) A.C. Frieden along the Malecón, the lengthy waterfront boulevard; **(above right)** Frieden visits the set of an anti-Castro political activist's film studio at an undisclosed location in Havana.



(above left) A.C. Frieden visits an outdoor bookstand that--surprisingly--offered for sale books from various American fiction authors--sadly, no copies of Frieden's own thrillers! (above right) A.C. Frieden stands in front of a Soviet-made tank turned into a memorial facing the former palace of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista prior to his overthrow; (below) A.C. Frieden visited the enormous Russian Embassy compound--today still the largest diplomatic compound in Havana.





(above) The Museo de la Revolución is located in the Old Havana and was the former Presidential Palace of all Cuban presidents, including dictator Fulgencio Batista. After the revolution, it was turned into a museum and features a wide range of artifacts, including aircraft, rifles, uniforms, maps and other military gear.



(above left) A.C. Frieden overlooks the entrance to San Cristobal Cathedral; (above right) A government building decorated with the iconic image of Ernesto "Che" Guevara in front of the Plaza de la Revolución.

About the author: A.C. Frieden is international novelist and lawyer based in Chicago. He is the author of several political/espionage thrillers and suspense novels, including the Jonathan Brooks series, as well as other fiction and non-fiction literary works. For more information, visit his website at www.acfrieden.com and his literary travel/research blog.

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