

Discover Cuba

Looking for authentic Cuban cuisine? Discover the unique tour that will land you a seat at the table.



I hope with the tours that we make a difference in the travelers' lives.

PHOTO: STARR RESTAURANTS

A Three-City Tour: Chef Rodriguez's Culinary Concept

For one chef, a trip to Cuba became more than a culinary turning point; it's a reason to keep coming back—with hungry food-lovers in tow.

By Meghan Catucci

Douglas Rodriguez is a self-proclaimed food obsessive. Having won numerous awards, including the famous and prestigious James Beard Award for excellence in cuisine, his obsession appears to be paying off.

The hot hand

A co-owner, along with restaurateur Stephen Starr, of Alma de Cuba, in Philadelphia, Rodriguez is considered the father of Nuevo Latino cuisine. And he tries to share his love of food with others every chance he gets. In addition to the many accolades, Rodriguez has been featured in national magazines and television shows. He's also authored four books.

But a high point for the chef was when his team at Alma de Cuba competed in COCHON555, a national fine-dining tour

aimed at promoting the sustainable farming of heritage breed pigs, with some of the best chefs in Philadelphia.

Simmering interest

Rodriguez's love for food and cooking started at a young age. He cites Julia Child as a major influence in forging his life's path.

"I often watched her PBS program on Saturday mornings," he recalls. "She was certainly a big influence at a time when I was perhaps most impressionable, and I point to her often as helping me become truly passionate about cooking."

Staying in touch

Most recently, Rodriguez has begun hosting culinary tours with his wife throughout Cuba that include discussions with local artists and chefs, walking tours and visits to attractions throughout the city.

"My first visit to Cuba was in 2013, for

the Havana Biennial Art Exhibition," he says. "I became so fascinated. I returned home wanting to hold onto that magic I felt there—sad to not have had more time. I hope with the tours that we make a difference in the travelers' lives, bringing them the experience—the magic—I felt on that first, and every, trip."

Rodriguez's tours are part of the "People to People" exchange, a federal government licensing incentive to encourage interaction and education between cultures. "Because our tours are part of this program, every traveler has the opportunity to interact with locals and culture of Cuba in the most meaningful way," says Rodriguez. "I work to make each trip different and truly unique."

The next tour, called "Havana, Viñales and Matanzas: A Tale of 3 Cities," will take place from March 10 to 17, with a limited number of spots still available. Anyone interested in an upcoming culinary tour can visit the Chef Douglas Rodriguez website for more details. ■

