desertsun.com

The Desert Sun TRAVEL

GEO QUIZ

How close in distance are the United States and Russia? A. 4,100 miles; B. 2,800 miles C. 50 miles D. 2 1/2 miles

ANSWER, E6

JAMES MEIER, NEWS DIRECTOR, (760) 778-4623, JAMES.MEIER@DESERTSUN.COM, @TDSJAMESMEIER

Viva Cuba

Romance, arts, culture beckon visitors to a thoroughly intriguing place largely frozen in time

By Lydia Kremer
Special to The Desert Sun

Perhaps because Cuba has been forbidden fruit for Americans for decades, travel to the Caribbean island nation has long had a strong seductive appeal. But with the recent easing of travel restrictions, now more than ever, Cuba is the "it" travel destination.

For good reason — Cuba is a thoroughly intriguing place. The spirit of the Cuban people is imbued with the beauty and warmth of the tropical sun, while daily life pulses with Afro Caribbean rhythms. Plus, it's a dazzlingly romantic place that has been largely frozen in time.

The moment I arrived at Havana's José Martí International Airport, I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland. I sensed I was about to experience something extraordinary and uniquely authentic. I was not disappointed.

Please see CUBA, E6

KATHERINE HOUGH PHOTOS

Right: Restored colonial mansions in Cuba. **Below:** The sprawling Cuba Valle de Vinales UNESCO site.

Kathy Strong

GOING MY WAY

Marina del Rey maintains allure after 50 years

50 Reasons to Visit Marina del Rey this Year

Occupying only 807 acres—with half of that under water—tiny Marina del Rey manages to retain a "regal" following that backs up its name. It stands as the largest man-made small-craft harbor in the United States. This year, the 1950's-imagined phenomenon celebrates its 50th birthday with memorable festivities that unfold throughout 2015, highlighted by a big birthday bash in April.

Bordered by Los Angeles on three sides, the seaside community is often swept up into the identity of its better known neighbors, Venice and Santa Monica. But the tiny burg with world-class marina definitely stands alone on appeal, with no better time to visit than this year. Its coveted allure retains a laid- back South Seas ambiance that permeates the golden sands of its main beach where swaying palms frame an azure lagoon. It is no wonder the founding fathers gave it street names like Bora Bora and Tahiti.

Marina's first hotel re-emerges

Just in time for birthday celebrations, Marina del Rey's first hotel just re-opened after a $25 million renovation. The 1964-established Marina del Rey Hotel debuted its new look in January, part of the Pacifica Hotel group. The iconic waterfront property features 164 updated guest rooms and suites, a

Please see STRONG, E6

IF YOU GO

Marina del Rey Convention & Visitors Bureau
www.visitmarinadelrey.com
;(888) 344-3968
Marina del Rey Hotel
13534 Bali Way
Marina del Rey, CA 90292
http://www.pacificahotels.com/marinadelreyhotel;
(310) 301-1000

Strong

Continued from E5

full service restaurant—SALT, an outdoor, marina-facing pool and sundeck, boat slips and more. The hotel is offering grand opening specials that include 25 percent off the room rate and complimentary upgrades to a marina view room.

Appropriately, the décor has a maritime flavor with calming cool colors on the interior and an azure marine exterior. SALT offers indoor and outdoor seating facing the water and serves seasonal cuisine sourced from local farmer's markets and, of course, the ocean. Plan a picturesque sunset happy hour with $5 bites, beer, wine and well drinks to begin or end the day.

Anniversary happenings

The 58th Annual Progressive Insurance Los Angeles Boat Show takes place February 19 to 22 on shore at the Los Angeles Convention Center and in the water at Marina del Rey. This year, larger than ever, the West Coast's premier boat show will showcase hundreds of boats, from entry-level family cruisers to million-dollar yachts. With the addition of the in-water portion of the show, visitors can also find super-sized new and brokerage yachts — both power and sail — available for on-board tours and cruising "test drives."

In honor of Marina del Rey's birthday, MarinaFest 2015 will be celebrated for three days in April. On Friday, April 10, "Happy Birthday Marina del Rey!" will be the official start of MarinaFest, complete with a formal ceremony, community birthday cake, a special concert by Three Dog Night and a fireworks show. On April 11 and 12, MarinaFest will feature a variety of activities including Tall Ships, a boat show, free boat rides, marine-related exhibits, water-taxi cruises, yacht club tours, vendors, food and beverages. For the little ones, there will also be inflatables, rides and games.

Serious "waterfront" dining

You don't see many people walking in L.A., but In Marina del Rey cars are replaced by water buses, June 18 through September 7 on weekends and holidays. For just $1, you can ride to seven popular stops, from Fisherman's Village to Marina Beach.

The newest trend in waterfront dining is to paddle, swim or boat to dinner, with Marina del Rey one of the few Los Angeles coastal locations to offer "dock & dine." A local restaurant, Killer Shrimp, offers a public landing so that guests can arrive for dinner or sunset happy hour via kayak, jet ski, paddleboard or boat. Although you still need shirt and shoes to dine, the acceptable footwear includes water shoes. The longtime favorite bistro is known for its irresistible shrimp prepared in a spicy sauce.

On Thursday evenings, May through August, plan to dine with sand between your toes at "Beach Eats"—an assortment of L.A.'s best food trucks serving grilled cheese, sliders, city dogs and more with a gourmet flair. Thursday mornings are your time to pick up some tasty lunch items from the city's popular farmer's market that takes place at Marina Beach from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"Beach Party" concerts

Summer brings the small city to its feet along the waterfront. Marina del Rey's free summer concerts at charming Burton W. Chace Park features "Symphonic Thursdays" featuring Bernadette Peters on August 21 and "Pop Saturdays," with such performers as Blue Oyster Cult (August 2) and Roberta Flack (August 16). All concerts begin at 7 p.m. so that concert-goers get the added bonus of watching the sun set over the water. Visit www.visitmarinadelrey.com for a complete schedule.

Follow "Going My Way" on twitter@KathyStrong2.

Marina del Rey stands as the largest man-made small-craft harbor in the United States.

DISCOVER CRUISES & TRAVEL

Voted Best Agency in the Inland Empire
Celebrating our 20th Year

Royal Caribbean INTERNATIONAL

PACIFIC COAST
7 Night
From $878 ppdo
No Flying
Includes Taxes

CARIBBEAN
7 Night
From $969 ppdo
Includes Air,
Transfers & Taxes

ALASKA
7 Night
From $1,409 ppdo
Includes Air,
Transfers & Taxes

CANADA & NEW ENGLAND
12 Night
From $1,860 ppdo
Includes Air,
Transfers & Taxes

PANAMA CANAL
14 Night
From $1,899 ppdo
Includes Air,
Transfer & Taxes

TRANS ATLANTIC
15 Night
From $1,979 ppdo
Includes Air,
Transfers & Taxes

Many More Itineraries and Specials to Choose from!
CALL or EMAIL For Our EXCLUSIVE SUPER DEALS
chris@discovercruisesandtravel.com

(909) 793-1996 or (800) 700-7172
1630 W Redlands Blvd. E, Redlands, CA
Rates subject to availability. Ships registry Bahamas SOT 2057514-40

GEOQUIZ ANSWER

2 1/2 miles, the distance between Big Diomede island, held by Russia, and Little Diomede, held by the United States. They are in the Bering Strait, between mainland Alaska and Siberia.