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Travel

Cuba

BY VIVIAN MORGAN

SYNDICATED TRAVEL NEWS - Cuba today is an impressive combination of spectacular physical beauty and functional utilitarianism. It boasts some of the most exquisite beaches in the Caribbean, along with a volunteer building programme based on hard logic. Its people are a blend of shy reserve and spontaneous fun. At every turn the dedication of the people and love of country are evident. The Cuban government welcomes

visitors enthusiastically, but not at the expense of her own people. Tourist facilities are used as much by Cubans as by visitors, especially during the summer months.

One of Cuba's most famous attractions is Varadero Beach, a well-maintained finger of land which beckons the visitor to sample the warm, turquoise waters of the Straits of Florida. As you stroll the powdery white sand beach it's easy to understand why this was once the playground of the very rich. The summer homes which

dot the long coast to the equator, which once existed. Gradually these faded homes are being turned into hotels, villas, and restaurants for the new breed of visitor to Cuba.

It is difficult to remain neutral to today's Cuba. It was an interestingly easy task for Canadian Graham Atkins Alexander, writing of the young people who serve you in the buses, restaurants, attending schools of hotel management, working at the day and working in the hotel, and reworking the other half. Their smiles leave an indelible impression.

Varadero is the perfect place to unravel frazzled nerves. The pace is slow, the atmosphere relaxed and the people friendly. Your biggest decision is whether to end a day's laborman and relax at a Dauphin at the change intoched roof beach bars, called Ranchos.

Contrary to some popular myths, visitors quite free to wander around. The only limitations outside national strength which hamper the world over are those caused by either ignorance or lack of transportation. While most of the hotels still have a limited command of English and a few who speak only Spanish, car rentals are not yet available but are planned for the future. For the time being, you'll have to content yourself with what you can see on foot or by bicycle.

If you do go to Cuba, keep a few facts in mind. There is no tipping and Cubans don't understand the system so don't try. There is little to buy (a popular feature with the men) although you can always bring back rum and cigars. Take along your own beach towels, insect repellent and personal necessities. And bring extra film, batteries or flash bulbs as these things are hard to find.

A visit to Cuba is more than a holiday; it's an experience. Long after your tan has faded, you'll remember the shy warmth and quiet pride of the Cuban temperament.

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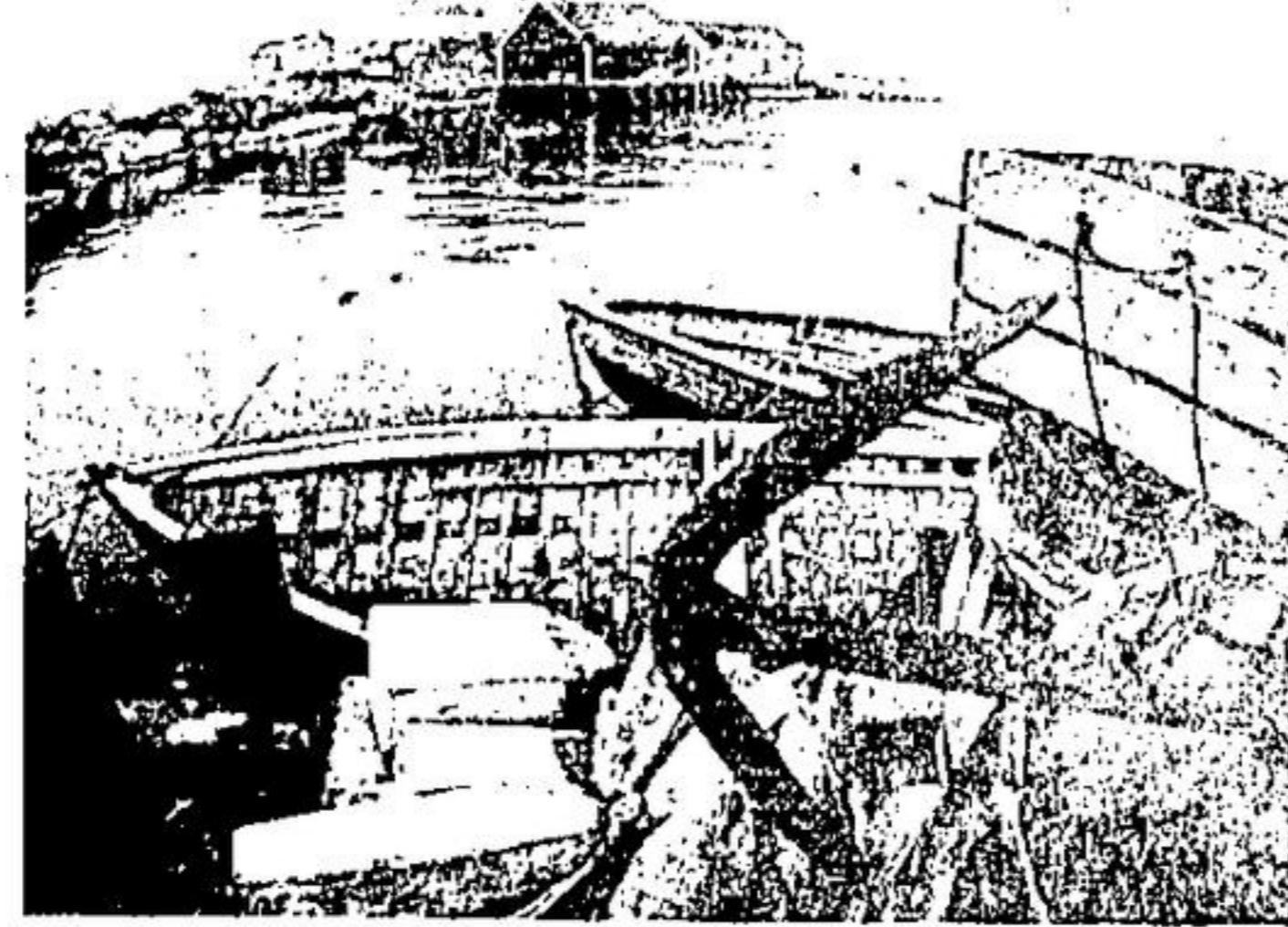
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