

## CINEMA



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### THE PURE JOY OF FILMING “3 DAYS IN HAVANA”

BY AJ TWIST / POSTED APRIL 9, 2014

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You might think that in a city where it can take half a day to find toothbrush for sale, making a feature film there would be wrought with challenges and frustrations. Not so for the Canadian independent filmmakers of *3 Days in Havana*. From the fun of casting some local actors and actresses, to scouting out possible

locations, to dining in some of the “finest restaurants I have ever eaten in” according to Gil Bellows, the film’s star, co-director, co-writer and co-producer, they discovered a place that they simply had to “show to people.”

Havana was not originally on the films radar. Tony Pantages (the film’s other co-director, co-writer and co-producer) and Bellows, were looking for a place where the audience would feel the sense of a ‘stranger in a strange land.’ They consulted with a film location specialist in Bellows’ hometown of Vancouver who suggested they have a look at Havana.

Off they went for a three day scouting adventure that was filled with great music, touring, meetings with film and government officials, delicious food and so, so *much fun*, they knew they had found their film’s location. So Havana it was.

In order to make the idea gel, they needed a man on the ground to ensure the film production could become a reality. Enter Frank Vervoorst, President and Executive Producer with BUENAVISTAFILMS, and a German ex-pat who has been quarterbacking film and television production in Havana for the last sixteen years.

Vervoorst helped coordinate the government and location permits required to film in Havana – “You need about two weeks to do it and need to present the script to the authorities before that to get the job approved,” Vervoorst tells us. “Once we had those, the government pretty well left us to our own devices” says Bellows. Easy breezy, it seems.

The *3 days* production brought all of their own equipment” though Vervoorst claims they needed not to have done so. “Pretty well everything is available here” he says and is all up to “European standards”. This does not necessarily mean that they will be filming Iron Man 4 there anytime soon, but most production requirements can be met be they for television commercials, documentaries or feature films. When asked for advice for any aspiring filmmakers eyeing Havana as a possible location Vervoorst advises “Do a good pre- production with the right service company and you will be all right.” Was that a plug?

If you’ve been there, watching *3 Days in Havana*, familiarity of some of the locations adds to the thrill of viewing the film. The Hotel Nacional looms large in this film, not only the exterior and grounds but also its rooms, elevators and corridors. Then there are the more unique settings such as a scene of the two main characters enjoying a Cuban cocktail smack *in* the middle of an empty Hotel Riviera swimming pool. I asked if they had to ask management to empty it; Bellows says, “No, it just happened to be empty the day we wanted to shoot there”. Divine intervention at no extra cost!



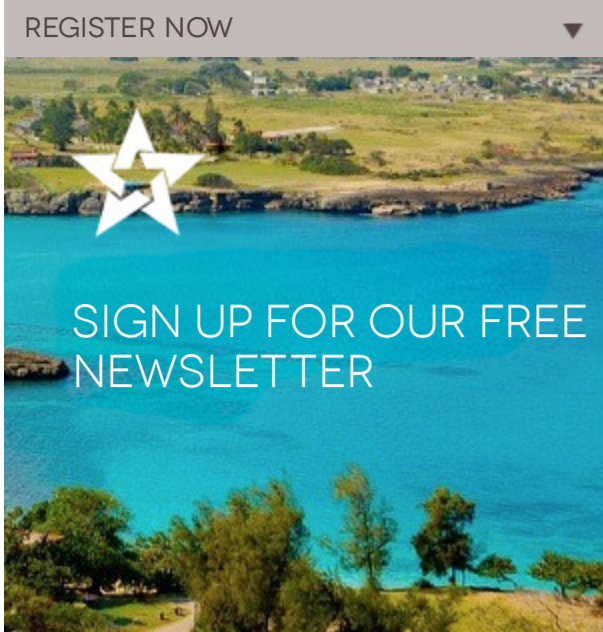
According to Bellows, their production consisted of a tight crew of sixteen. In some of their production photographs, it appears that there’s a much larger crew at work. Bellows casually suggested that there were probably many bystanders who simply decided to help out, as was so often the case as they shot in the streets and alleys of Havana. “When there is something happening, people just come out to watch and gladly lend a hand.” Such is the experience of shooting a film in Cuba. Not much different than any other day on an island wanting to welcome and please its visitors.

*3 Days in Havana* is now playing in major Canadian cities and possibly for its last weekend. Catch it while you can.

See A.J. Twist’s earlier film [review here](#):

A.J. Twist is a Montreal-based travel writer frantically trying to come up with a script (and money) to shoot in Havana.


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| CURRENT WEATHER   |                 |   |                  |
|---|-----------------|---|------------------|
|  | HAVANA<br>25°C  |  | SANTIAGO<br>28°C |
|  | HOLGUÍN<br>28°C |  | VARADERO<br>25°C |
| <div><div>°C</div><div>°F</div>...MORE INFO ON CUBAN WEATHER</div>                    |                 |   |                  |

WHAT'S ON CALENDAR!!!

Through February 22nd / Galería Arte-Facto  
CLANDESTINA 99% PROJECT


January 28th, 17:00 / Teatro Mella. Gardens  
MUCHO MÁS QUE RAP

23 January 16:00 / Casa del ALBA Cultural  
PIQUETE TÍPICO CUBANO IN CONCERT

Through January 22nd / Casa de la Obra Pía  
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