

## HEALTH & BEAUTY



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### CRIS-CRIS: HAVANA'S ONLY LINGERIE BOUTIQUE

BY AJ TWIST / POSTED NOVEMBER 29, 2016

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Recently Havana has become a dining/shopping city – quite surprising considering the condition of its buildings and economy. Perhaps it's the exploding tourism, perhaps its enthusiasm on the streets. Cafés are busy, people are carrying packages.

An estimated 500 new restaurants have opened in Havana thanks to the relaxation of the regulations towards private enterprises. I would bet that roughly the same number of nail salons have also sprung open with an enthusiastic clientele to boot. And perhaps most surprising an original lingerie shop has opened its doors. Welcome to Cris-Cris.

Cris-Cris is a tiny corner boutique at the corner of Villegas and Tentiente Rey (Brasil) facing the newly renovated Plaza del Cristo in Old Havana. Don't blink while looking for it as



food, the music, the children, my house, my husband, the food-everything about the place. It's amazing to live here!"

Originally a costume designer for the theatre (she has already designed costumes for two operas in Havana since living here) and a specialist in corsets (Cris-cris gave me a crash course on the history of corsets during our interview), she now has a modest production line consisting of herself and a local Cuban seamstress who lovingly sew a delicate and stylish line for her boutique. With fabrics sourced from Berlin and, more recently, from Mexico, the look and feel of the garments equal those found in exclusive boutiques on the Champs Elysee but with much lower price points.



photo credit: Nicolas Ordonez

The prices are surprisingly affordable given the quality of the garments and the fabrics. In some ways, one can't help to feel that not only is Cris-Cris pricing her goods within the limitations of a challenging retail environment but also 'giving back' in her own way to her adopted country and country women whom she adores dearly.

Locals, tourists and ex-pats agree, Cris-Cris is a welcome addition to the Havana retail landscape and potential shoppers would do well to drop by before the corsets sell out!

#### Cris-Cris

361 Villegas, corner Teniente Rey (Brasil)

tel: 05-395-9690

email: [criscris@enet.cu](mailto:criscris@enet.cu)

web: [www.cris-cris.de](http://www.cris-cris.de)

*A.J. Twist is a Montreal-based travel writer and photographer desperately seeking a pair of silk boxers.*

[ajtwist@me.com](mailto:ajtwist@me.com)

[visitcuba.com](http://visitcuba.com)

you just might miss it, it is simply that discrete. Snuggled in kitty corner from the hot new destination drop-in [Café Dandy's](#) <link>and right next to an outdoor shoemaker and a gaggle of bici-taxis, Cris-Cris is a hidden gem amongst the urban decay.

The story behind Cris-Cris is a romantic one. Founded by a German ex-pat, a woman who insists one use her "artist's name, "Cris-Cris" (pronounced "cree-cree") rather than her real name ("no one is interested in my real name"). Cris-Cris originally discovered Cuba while on vacation. Quickly she fell in love with an island...and a man.

Fast forward a few years, her love for both continued so much so she eventually left all that she had built up in Berlin, which had included three lingerie boutiques and a flourishing wholesale business, packed up her ten-year-old daughter, and moved to Havana where she soon gave birth to twins.

She could not be happier! "I love the architecture here, the people, the



"Here I am able to offer my clients wholesale prices. A swimsuit, for example, that I might have sold in Berlin for the equivalent of 200 CUCs costs 30 in my boutique" explains Cris-Cris.

On the subject of price, I ask her if Cubans can afford the prices and if she gets very many locals stopping by?

"Yes. Many Cubans shop here, especially the dancers. They usually do not buy right away. Many will visit two to three times before buying. They will find something they like and then go off and save up the money by sacrificing this and that for a few weeks and then return with the money for their purchase. But once they have it, they have it for life! The Cubans take very good care of their clothes."

Where the other shoppers come from and how do they hear about her store? " I don't know where they come from. Some walk by from the cruise ships, others just find us by word of mouth." Personally, I had heard about the store from a couple of ex-pats over dinner who were excitedly gossiping about their newfound lingerie store with the giddiness of teenagers.

As far as what is on offer at Cris-Cris, shoppers can find a stylish array of lingerie including bra and panty sets, whimsical wraps to be worn over bathing suits, one and two piece bathing suits, a smattering of corsets ("for fun"), garter belts and accessories such as lacy gloves.



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