

# Shampains Talk Cuba

Pam and Mike Shampain made their first trip to Cuba in 2006 and have visited this island nation just 90 miles off the United States shore every year since. Their insight into the enigmatic country is keen as they have first-hand knowledge of the culture and changes that have taken place there.

For years, Pam and Mike have been very skeptical of the announced changes by the Cuban government. They didn't see how they were going to benefit the Cuban people, particularly in job creation. The Cubans are well educated, have a 97 percent literacy rate and are very industrious, hardworking and family-oriented. It's amazing what they can accomplish with limited financial resources.



For the first time, the Shampains felt very hopeful that changes will be made that offer more freedom of choice for the future of Cubans. Raul Castro, more open to discussion about change than was his brother, is seen as a catalyst for such change, especially as Cuba and the U.S. move toward reconciliation. "Our new feeling is not based on any specific innovative changes," the Shampains project, "but on the dialogue in which the U.S. and Cuban governments have engaged thus far." Added to this optimism was the final decision by the U.S. to rescind Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, effective May 29, 2015.

The one idea that continues to grow in Cuba is the freedom of religion. Since Russia significantly reduced its influence, the church in Cuba has begun to grow again. Last year, the seminary in Matanzas had the largest graduating class in its history. Even Raul Castro recently told the pope he plans to return to church and prayer.

Another significant change they witnessed in Varadero and Havana is the addition of hundreds of brand new yellow Hyundai taxis. They we're sure this was the result of the increase in tourism, business interests and/or and more U.S. "people to people" tours. The hotels are full and the Paladors, the privately owned restaurants, are increasing in number.

To quote Bob Dylan's iconic song title, "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Pam and Mike feel blessed to be part of FPC's Cuba Mission Team and thank the congregation for supporting our brothers and sisters in the Cuban Presbyterian Church.

2015 Trip Participants: Connie Allen, John Allen, Cerrie Gammons, Bill Kirby, Ellie Pelaez, Randy Pelaez, Wayne Pelaez, Rev. Sandra Randleman, Mike Shampain, Pam Shampain, and Jack Stringham.