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To cite this article: Richard E. Morris (2016): Hosts and guests in early Cuba tourism, Journal of Tourism History, DOI: 10.1080/1755182X.2016.1212936

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2016.1212936

Published online: 03 Aug 2016.
Hosts and guests in early Cuba tourism
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ABSTRACT
Drawing upon travel narratives, this paper proposes that early tourist movements within Cuba depended on negotiated relationships between Cuban hosts and American guests, particularly invalids (acutely or chronically sick persons) in search of places to alleviate their illness. Nance’s (2007) facilitated access model provides the theoretical framework. In this model, hosts are active players in negotiations with guests in contact zones where tourism development is rudimentary or even nonexistent. Invalid tourists, residing as guests on the estates of wealthy rural planters, primed local economies and helped pave the way for general tourism. Cuban planter-hosts lavished hospitality on invalid guests as a way to consolidate their social status with American elites, at the same time shielding them from the brunt of African slavery as a self-protective measure.

1. Introduction
In the winter of 1828, Boston clergyman Abiel Abbot travelled to Cuba. In letters published the following year, he described warm sun, soft breezes, and exotic settings. He also described a visit to the estate of a Mr M., in the island’s rustic interior:

It seems as if the garden of Eden could not be more beautiful than his grounds. His buildings are handsome, and his house, with piazzas on every side, spacious and airy. Everything around looks like a garden, and borders of wild ipecacuanha, in red blossoms, skirt his walks, and orange trees full of ready fruit, alternating with trees still more ornamental, form his avenues.1

Abbot’s passage to Mr M.’s estate was no small feat: first, a horseback journey of some 50 miles from Havana to Matanzas, next an upriver boat trip, assisted by rowers, to a dock where he transferred ‘at length’ to a horsedrawn volante for the remaining three or four miles to the estate. Even more extraordinary, however, was the fact that Abbot made the trip in extremely frail health. He had been suffering from an ‘eleven year cough’ relieved only by travel to warmer climates during the cold, damp North American winters.

Abbot was not the first of his kind. In his letters, he frequently mentioned other INVALIDS, as chronically ill travellers were called at the time. For example, he wrote that a host family at La Carolina was well accustomed to taking in ‘unfortunate beings’ like him during the ‘invalid season’, a reference to the North American winter that many invalids
sought to escape. It is unknown how many invalids chose Cuba as a travel destination during the nineteenth century, but the travel books written specifically for Cuba-bound invalids are numerous. Also, invalids were mentioned often enough in travel books to suggest that they formed a sizable demographic within the tourist masses. For example, John Abbott described invalids as a ‘sad scene’ on his Cuba-bound steamship, and Julia Ward Howe pitied their ‘drooping’ in the heat of a Havana hotel. John Wurdemann reported that the boarding house in Güines was overrun with invalids and was ‘too much of a hospital’ to be enjoyed by regular tourists. In Havana, Robert Gibbes took pleasure in recommending the Hotel Cubano ‘as affording every accommodation for the invalid.’ Wherever American travellers went in Cuba, invalids abounded.

Invalids were drawn to Cuba by its warm climate and fair winds, which soothed acute or chronic respiratory illnesses such as asthma and consumption. Getting to Cuba was fairly easy; numerous tour packages were available from coastal Atlantic cities. However, not all of Cuba appealed to invalids. Travel writers typically touted the island’s interior and southern coast as offering the best climate for invalids; however, these regions lay outside the island’s tourist infrastructures and therefore lacked up-to-date accommodations and services. Roads were virtually nonexistent. Thus, reaching the interior was tricky, requiring no small measure of physical stamina and logistical savvy. Invalids who accepted the challenge planned their movements strategically and invariably relied upon word of mouth, the experiences of others, and the assistance of Cubans they met along the way. Rural planters in particular rose to the task of offering aid. The more affluent ones had comfortable plantation dwellings with ample room for guests, and many welcomed invalids into their homes. The orderly yet colourful surroundings, which included lush fruit groves, cafetales, tobacco vegas, and sugarcane cañaverales, flooded the senses and enriched the invalid’s experience, which lasted days, weeks, or even months.

The invalids’ choice of locale – rural inland rather than urban coastal – separated them from ‘traditional’ tourists, who preferred the comforts, leisure activities, and relative modernity of the capital city, Havana. It also impacted how and when the Cuban interior was opened to tourism. Writing nearly a quarter century after Abbot’s Cuba sojourn, travel writer William H. Hurlbert praised invalids as the island’s tourism pioneers, and acknowledged that they had depended, for their successes, ‘upon the unfailing hospitality of the planters’. The American invalid’s contribution to the development of tourism in Cuba was typical of invalid travellers generally, who, according to Maria Frawley, ‘both participated in and helped to create the emerging culture of tourism’.

Drawing extensively upon travel narratives, this paper proposes that early tourist movements within Cuba depended on negotiated relationships between Cuban hosts and American guests, particularly invalids in search of places to alleviate their illness. Susan

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2Ibid., 31.
3John S.C. Abbott, South and North; Or, Impressions Received during a Trip to Cuba and the South (New York: Abbot & Abbot, 1860), 25.
4Julia Ward Howe, A Trip to Cuba (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1860), 177.
5John Wurdemann, Notes on Cuba (Boston: James Munroe, 1844), 96.
7In this paper, the words ‘tourist’, ‘traveller’, and ‘visitor’ are used more or less interchangeably without consequence for the discussion.
8William H. Hurlbert, Gan-Eden; Or, Pictures of Cuba (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1854), 133–4.
Nance’s facilitated access model provides the theoretical framework.\textsuperscript{10} It is argued that invalid tourists, hosted by Cuban planters, helped open physical and logistical pathways into the island’s interior and played a significant though mostly unnoticed role in the development of Cuba tourism. It will be shown that while the earliest plantation guests were mostly invalids, as the century progressed this demographic included increasing numbers of ‘regular’ tourists. This demographic shift impacted how Cuban planter-hosts engaged and interacted with their American guests.

2. Materials: travel narratives

The rise in pleasure travel in the early nineteenth century saw a parallel rise in narratives written to promote, facilitate, or reflect upon this travel.\textsuperscript{11} During the century, no fewer than 100 travel books were published in the United States about Cuba.\textsuperscript{12} The reason for the high volume of narratives was, at least in part, Cuba’s geographic proximity and exotic mythos, not to mention its delightful climate. Cuba also had the distinction of being entangled with the most contentious social issue of the day: slavery. Cuba was an economic powerhouse that depended on free African labour. Americans on both sides of the slavery debate wondered whether Cuba should be annexed and, if so, whether Cuban slavery should be abolished along with American slavery or allowed to thrive awhile longer. Opinions were as varied as they were vehement. Not surprisingly, the 15 years prior to the US Civil War were the most prolific period for travel writing on Cuba. These writings were freighted with observations about slave conditions and the overall state of the peculiar institution at the time. Many were superficial or dismissive, but a few probed for clarity. For example, Maturin Ballou ingenuously declared that there were ‘doubtless instances of cruelty towards the slaves’, but that he ‘never witnessed a single evidence of this’ during his stay in the island.\textsuperscript{13} On the other hand, Julia Ward Howe pondered the life of a ‘poor slave’ woman she observed washing and ironing, and the ‘great debt … piled up against her before she was born.’\textsuperscript{14}

As a loose literary form, travel narratives offered Americans a way to substantiate opinions on a range of social concerns; no doubt those focused on Cuba helped shape the slavery debate as one that reached far beyond American borders.\textsuperscript{15} Threaded among these posturings was a wealth of information about early tourist movements to, from, and across Cuba, some of it quite detailed, and much of it pertaining specifically to the travel interests of invalids.

This study consults 13 Cuba travel narratives published in the United States between 1829 and 1872, selected primarily on the basis of whether they include information

\textsuperscript{13}Maturin Ballou, \textit{History of Cuba; or, Notes of a Traveller in the Tropics} (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1854), 183.
\textsuperscript{14}Howe, \textit{Trip to Cuba}, 196.
about or potentially of interest to invalids. Eight other narratives and travel books are consulted as they pertain to Cuba tourism patterns and practices generally. The travel writers represented a range of social and professional backgrounds; according to demographic information furnished by Harold Smith and Alice Wexler, most were well-published journalists or authors. Maturin Ballou, William Hurlbert, Benjamin Norman, John Abbott, and Samuel Hazard were, at some point in their careers, editors of successful newspapers, and their travel books targeted loyal reading audiences. Ballou’s *Due South*, for example, was part of a series that included a round-the-world voyage. Three of the writers – Robert Gibbes, John Wurdemann, and Richard Levis – were renowned physicians and themselves invalids. Abiel Abbot had attended Harvard with John Adams and was a respected, outspoken Federalist. Julia Ward Howe, an abolitionist, is famous for penning ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’. One early writer called himself simply ‘An Invalid’ and remains anonymous.

Travel narratives are subjective records, incorporating both tourist experiences and tourist expectations. Both facets of the travel experience are highly relevant to the understanding of tourism and provide a much more comprehensive picture of tourism at a given time and place than other alternatives, such as printed advertisements, train schedules, or court documents. Travel narratives are useful in the study of host–guest transactions because they tend to record information about getting things like food, lodging, travel, and entertainment, at the point of contact, whether with a driver, desk clerk, waiter, guide, etc. Even if details are sparse, these set-pieces can be, as Louis Pérez proposes, ‘rich with implication’, and speak volumes about the writer’s personal perspectives, expectations, and economic interests.

### 3. Method: facilitated access

In Cuba, the planter host and the invalid guest negotiated arrangements involving everything from lodging to transportation to entertainment. The best way to make sense of this dynamic is by careful application of John Urry’s ‘tourist gaze’. In Urry’s original conceptualisation of the term, the tourist ‘gazes’ upon the foreign locale and all its trappings (people, buildings, foods, and customs). Darya Maoz’ study of Israeli backpackers in India proposes that the gaze is actually mutual; that is, while the tourist is gazing upon the host, the host is gazing back, perhaps covertly. For example, on hearing that a tourist has only two days to learn the craft of reiki massage, a practitioner creates an ‘authentic’ learning experience to meet the tourist’s need. Of course, the covert nature of the local’s gaze means that it can be applied manipulatively, in this case to create a *faux* authenticity that the tourist accepts as real. Maoz’ conceptualisation challenges the classical notion of the local as a passive subject, imposed or intruded upon by the tourist, and suggests rather that the local has a tactical advantage: whereas the tourist’s gaze is

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17Maturin Ballou, *Due South; Or, Cuba Past and Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885).


partly assembled from media that may well embellish or mislead (travel guides, brochures, and advertisements), the local’s gaze is constructed by in-person experiences.\(^\text{22}\)

This conceptualisation is essential to make sense of any negotiation in which guest and host both have an economic interest, such as settling the cost of a taxi ride, checking into (or out of) a hotel, rectifying a perceived error on the restaurant bill, etc. Modern mass tourism involves few, if any, contacts of this type. This is not to say that no negotiation occurs, only that the negotiation is passively experienced rather than actively produced, ‘other-directed’ (by the host) rather than shared, dynamic, and dialogic.\(^\text{23}\) According to Louis Turner and John Ash, commercialisation of a contact zone downgrades the foreign visitor from ‘genuine guest’ to ‘formal tourist’, a status which ‘precludes all but formal commercial relationships’, because ‘mutual understanding and the true interaction of cultures are lost’.\(^\text{24}\) ‘Simple’ transactions are replaced by ‘complex’ ones, with guest and host increasingly objectifying each other.\(^\text{25}\) It is the simple negotiations between host and guest, however, that reveal the most about the social, economic, and political aspects of the mutual gaze.

Negotiations that occur outside traditional tourist frames of reference are most likely to fall under the ‘simple’ classification. Nance’s study of guest–host dynamics in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century is instructive on this point: in absence of Western-style resorts or organised tours, European visitors to the lands of the Levant depended on informal arrangements negotiated on site with dragomen (translator-guides), who FACILITATED ACCESS to the locales or experiences that the visitors sought.\(^\text{26}\) Importantly, while tourists commonly described their tenders as social inferiors or worse, the dragomen did not see tourists as superiors, but rather as customers.\(^\text{27}\) By drawing upon a broad network of existing contacts as well as their own expertise, the dragomen drew tourists into logistically challenging locales and helped them experience the locales more satisfyingly than they could have on their own. This dynamic prevailed wherever tourists were required to forge their own pathways, as was the case in many settings before the advent of the package tour.\(^\text{28}\)

The needs and interests of invalids in Cuba were different from those of visitors to the Levant, but not greatly so. Whereas travellers to the Levant were hardy types seeking some combination of recreation, knowledge, or experience, invalids went to Cuba mostly for ‘climatic treatment’. According to Belfast physician James Lindsay, a respiratory disease specialist whose writings were published on both sides of the Atlantic, climatic treatment involved relocation from a:

> comparatively sunless and depressing climate, which impairs vitality and lowers nutrition, to a sunny and tonic climate where appetite, digestion, and sanguification undergo such


\(^{23}\)Wearing, Stevenson, and Young, Tourist Cultures, 95; Dennis Merrill, Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 101.


\(^{26}\)Nance, ‘Facilitated Access Model’, 1063.

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 1064.

augmentation as may enable the patient to shake off or hold at bay the tendency to consumptive disease.\textsuperscript{29}

Accordingly, Lindsay warned against ‘all plans and amusements which are in any degree hazardous’, including ‘chilly cathedrals’, ‘hot picture galleries’, and ‘dusty streets’.\textsuperscript{30}

\section*{4. Climate, health, and the pursuit of healing}

Not all travelling invalids spent their days in bed, however. Although ‘forbidden’ to take in many ‘traditional’ tourist diversions, many invalids felt morally compelled to keep busy.\textsuperscript{31} One way to do so was to travel. For an invalid like Abbot, ‘travel’ included exploration off the beaten path after reaching the destination. Abbot divulged with some pride that over a 4-month period, he travelled 1000 miles across Cuba, ‘but once over the same road’.\textsuperscript{32} Wurdemann sang the health benefits of constantly moving about the island, because of the ‘pleasant stimulus’ it afforded to the invalid’s mind, and the ‘attendant exercise of the body’ that it provided.\textsuperscript{33} Such information would have primed the Cuba-bound invalid for an outward-directed experience far removed from the bedchamber. Nevertheless, there were places even the most outgoing invalids sought to avoid.

To the extent they could afford to do so, travelling invalids have traditionally avoided cities. The connection between healing and retreat from urban life probably had its roots in a sense, not altogether unfounded, that cities are unhealthy. In ancient Greece, for example, centres of spiritual healing (asclepieia) were often built away from populated areas.\textsuperscript{34} In ancient Rome, the wealthy deserted the city every summer to retire to countryside villas, leaving behind the city’s poor in hot, squalid slums where disease flourished.\textsuperscript{35} Consequently, cities developed a reputation as hotbeds of disease that persisted well into the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{36} In that century, socially minded Europeans advocated improvements to public health; for example, asylums were built increasingly in rural settings.\textsuperscript{37} As a result of these improvements, there was plenty of scientific and pseudoscientific information for the invalid to consult while deciding where to go to nurture a chronic illness, as well as why to avoid doing so in just about any city.

Cuba travel narratives generally advised invalids not to linger in Havana any longer than necessary. One of the first writers explicitly to offer this advice wrote under the pseudonym ‘An Invalid’. Invalid, who suffered from ‘asthma and catarrh’, wrote a Cuba guidebook specifically for others of his kind, and he considered himself uniquely qualified to write it, since ‘no healthy man can be a competent judge of such matters’.\textsuperscript{38} Like most


\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, 213.

\textsuperscript{31}Frawley, \textit{Invalidism and Identity}, 38.

\textsuperscript{32}Abbot, \textit{Letters}, xiii.

\textsuperscript{33}Wurdemann, \textit{Notes on Cuba}, 10.


\textsuperscript{36}James Clark, \textit{The Influence of Climate in the Prevention and Cure of Chronic Diseases} (London: Thomas & George Underwood, 1829), 8.


\textsuperscript{38}An Invalid, \textit{A Winter in the West Indies and Florida} (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1839), vi–vii.
narratives of the time, his book is part objective description and part experiential travelogue, incorporating plenty of musings on the effects of climate on health. For example, in the city of Trinidad, on the island’s southern (Caribbean) coast, the winds were ‘variable, generally blowing from all points of the compass every twenty-four hours, with a gentle land breeze from the north at morning and evening …’. In Havana, on the island’s north coast, however, the scene was quite different. There, Invalid witnessed ‘invalids in abundance, shivering with cold …, and without exception, … complaining of the climate’. From these invalids, he heard ‘of nothing but northerns, which had been blowing nearly half the time, as they said, during the winter’.

Invalid’s book and others that followed it made much of Cuban wind – specifically the dreaded ‘norther’ – and with good reason. Throughout the century, epidemic disease was commonly associated with specific types of places as well as with meteorological phenomena. Physicians tied air and wind to health, and the quality of either one was enough to mark a locale as fit or unfit for human habitation. Writing in 1855, Cuban physician D. Ramón Piña y Peñuela asserted that:

all are aware that man is born and lives subject to the influence of the agents surrounding him, which modify his organism in a more or less varied manner; consequently his physical and moral body must bear the action of the climate in which he lives.

He also beseeched readers, when choosing a living space, to prefer one ‘in a ventilated place large enough to avoid the agglomeration of individuals that occurs in tight places, so harmful to health due to the vitiation of the air they breathe and the excessive heat they produce while sleeping’. Addressing travel-inclined invalids, Lindsay advised much the same thing: invalids should remove themselves ‘from among crowded populations and vitiated air to some region where there is no aggregation of large masses of people, and consequently no pollution of the air of respiration’. Travel writers folded variations on these advisories into their books, often drawing dubious conclusions and adding their own pseudomedical ‘spin’. Joseph W. Howe, for example, advised readers that damp air, variable temperature, poor ventilation, and crowding were ‘prolific causes’ of respiratory disease, adding that it was best for travellers to avoid urban hotels in favour of quiet, rural homes.

In addition to detailed expositions of winds and atmospheric states in different locations, Cuba guides devoted much attention to ‘malarial’ air. As a general term, malaria referred to the air that was believed to induce, among other things, fatal fevers. During the colonial period, fevers – specifically yellow fever – were a leading cause of death in the Caribbean region, and colonists and travellers feared them above most things. Fevers were commonly viewed as the direct result of humid heat. Medical experts tied fever to certain types of locations. A Spanish report claimed that fever targeted

39Ibid., 87–8. See also Ballou, History of Cuba, 72.
40Invalid, Winter, 110.
41D. Ramón Piña y Peñuela, Topografía médica de la isla de Cuba (Havana: Impresión y Encuadernación del Tiempo, 1855), 20. Here and throughout, all translations into English are mine.
42Lindsay, Climatic Treatment of Consumption, 21.
43Ibid., 29. See also D. Ramón Hernández Poggio, Aclimatación e higiene de los europeos en Cuba (Cádiz: Imprenta de la Revista Médica, 1874), 81–2.
‘lowlands and coastal areas’ while ‘losing its deadly effect at altitude’.

46 Such oversimplified statements made it easy for travel writers to jump to the conclusion that the island’s coastal areas were boiling with fever, and only the elevated inlands were safe for habitation.

47 Abbot urged invalids visiting Cuba to ‘always seek its high grounds’.

48 Wurdemann and Gibbes, both physicians, advised likewise. ‘Malaria reigns’, Wurdemann wrote, in all Cuban towns situated on ‘low, level soil’.

49 Gibbes urged invalids not to stay at a certain boarding house in Matanzas simply because it was too ‘low and hot’.

50 By the second half of the century, the logistical pathways invalids had forged into the interior were so well trodden that most travellers made one or more side trips to back-country plantations whether they were invalid or not. William Drysdale told readers in 1881 that a visit to a sugar plantation was ‘one of the best parts of coming to Cuba, and no Northern visitor should come to Cuba without seeing one’. The fact that he made no mention of air, wind, or yellow fever hints that by that time, most plantation visitors were tourists in the broadest sense of the word.

5. Facilitated access in the Cuban interior

There was much for invalids to dislike about Havana besides humidity, northers, and fevers. Hurlbert found the capital overpriced: ‘One pays the price of luxuries for necessities, and those poor of their kind’.

52 Philalethes described his Havana hotel as ‘miserable looking’.

53 Carlton Rogers arrived in Havana to find his hotel ‘nearly full’ with ‘miserable rooms’ and his lodging in Güines ‘a dingy out-building’.

54 The island’s rural hotels rated far worse. Levis bluntly warned readers that rural accommodations offered little more than hard beds, fleas, and mosquitoes.

55 Ballou was blunter still:

[T]here are no really good hotels in Cuba; those which exist are poor and expensive. On the inland routes away from the cities there are none, and the humble hostleries, or posadas, as they are called, are so indifferent in point of comforts as not to deserve the name of inns.

Invalids seeking a setting for their climatic treatment pushed inland and found the commodious estates of rural planters, which were perfectly situated in the island’s higher (and therefore more salubrious) regions. Wealthier planters welcomed invalids to their estates and provided room, board, and occasional entertainments at no charge, to acquaintances and strangers alike.

46Hernández Poggio, Aclimatación e higiene, 44.

47Invalid, Winter, 22; Wurdemann, Notes on Cuba, 299; Benjamin Norman, Rambles by Land and Water, Or Notes of Travel in Cuba and Mexico (New York: Paine & Burgess, 1845), 50; Ballou, History of Cuba, 69; Demoticus Philalethes, Yankee Travels through the Island of Cuba (New York: D. Appleton, 1856), 2; Richard J. Levis, Diary of a Spring Holiday in Cuba (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872), 115.

48Abbot, Letters, 190.


50Gibbes, Cuba for Invalids, 104.


52Hurlbert, Gan-Eden, 32.

53Philalethes, Yankee Travels, 2. ‘Demoticus Philalethes’ is a pseudonym; his writings are usually attributed to Ignacio Franchi Alfaro, who identified as a ‘Yankee’.

54Carlton H. Rogers, Incidents of Travel in the Southern States and Cuba (New York: R. Craighed, 1862), 112.

55Levis, Diary, 117.

56Ballou, Due South, 121–2.
The plantations gave invalids someplace to go besides Havana; heeding Wurdemann’s advice to have ‘but a short stay … in that city’, many skipped the Havana tour altogether and headed straight for the interior. The planter-hosts may not have competed aggressively with urban hotels for guests, but the efflux of travellers from Havana to inland plantations was apparently enough to worry some Havana hoteliers. At least one invalid guest was provided complimentary transportation from Havana to a plantation some 50 miles distant.

The Cuban plantation was a place of unrushed routine that placed few physical stresses on the invalid visitor while affording many conveniences, such as fresh, nourishing meals and unrestricted access to the surrounding grounds. Most plantation work took place outdoors, providing a sharp contrast with the labours of the snowbound North American winter. At least for their white inhabitants and their guests, plantation lodgings were simple but by no means sparse. Hurlbert described the main cottage of a cafetal as ‘an elegantly proportioned little tropical mansion, cool, dark, floored with marble, wainscoted, and furnished with rich deep-hued Indian woods’. Norman perceived his lodgings as ‘a complete picture of oriental wealth and luxury’. Abbot was taken by the uncramped privacy of his living space, which was ‘sufficiently large, with a door to shut at pleasure, and a grated window to let in the light and air’. The grounds surrounding the main dwelling were similarly aesthetic and inviting (Figure 1). Writers variously described the Cuban cafetal as a ‘pleasure grounds’, a ‘perfect garden’, and a ‘perfect El Dorado’. Dana noted that ‘time was required to perfect this garden … but when it matured, it was a cherished home’ (Figure 2).

The greatest attraction on the estate, however, was the planter himself, and to a lesser extent, his wife, family, tenants, and slaves. Descriptions of the planter leaned towards the romantic and idolising; he was a gentleman in the rough who deserved all the respect he received, and more. Bryant described one as ‘a handsome Cuban, with white teeth, a pleasant smile, and a distinct utterance of his native language’, who received guests ‘with great courtesy, and offered … cigarillos, though he never used tobacco; and spirit of cane, though he never drank’. In Hurlbert’s words, the planter was a unifying, civilising force in his domain, keeping watch over ‘those admirable arrangements and tasteful decorations, which make a great sugar estate so delightful to the stranger’.

Philalethes was a guest on a sugar estate for nearly three weeks and enjoyed himself thoroughly. Rebounding from whatever illness had sent him to Cuba in the first place, he took in a cockfight, went fishing, and visited countless nearby plantations, often in the amiable custody of the planter’s son. He even joined the family in its mixed-

57 Wurdemann, Notes on Cuba, 3, 65.
58 Gibbes, Cuba for Invalids, 33.
59 Philalethes, Yankee Travels, 2.
60 Hurlbert, Gan-Eden, 147.
61 Norman, Rambles, 53.
63 Julia Newell Jackson, A Winter Holiday in Summer Lands (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1890), 36; Wurdemann, Notes on Cuba, 139; Ballou, History of Cuba, 148.
64 Richard Henry Dana, To Cuba and Back: A Vacation Voyage (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1859), 117.
66 Hurlbert, Gan-Eden, 141.
67 Philalethes, Yankee Travels, 144–5, 158, 175–6.
Clearly, the benefits of staying on a back-country plantation outweighed the difficulty of getting there, in most cases. The personalised attention lavished by Cuban planters first on American invalids, and later on American travellers generally, incorporated many elements of social hospitality, which is commonly viewed as the precursor of commercial (mass) hospitality. The most salient features of both hospitality types are gathered in Table 1. As the table

\[68\] Ibid., 170.

**Figure 1.** Arrival at a Cuban coffee plantation. Source: *Mapa histórico pintoresco moderno de la isla de Cuba* (Havana: B. May 1853), map fragment. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford University. Used with permission.

**Figure 2.** Life on a Cuban sugar plantation. Source: *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 6 (1853): 167. Used with permission.
shows, the Cuban planter’s hospitality craft places him for most criteria at the ‘social’ end of the hospitality continuum, with one exception: his hospitality was usually determined by demand rather than supply (‘demand led’). That is to say, visitors to his estate did not wait passively for him to issue an invitation; rather, they actively sought him out to request accommodation. A representative case of demand-led hospitality was recorded by Abbot, who along with six other American gentlemen, ‘invited themselves to dine’ with a planter and were received ‘with great cordiality and pride’.

Initial contact with a planter was mediated in most cases by letters of introduction. Travellers obtained these letters from high-profile references in the United States and presented them in Cuba in exchange for assistance and services. The letters were a sine qua non of a fruitful stay in the interior; Wurdemann warned that travellers without them would ‘not meet with much attention’. Gibbes noted that this was especially true for the invalid, who ‘unless provided with letters to private gentlemen in the country’, would have ‘no chance of any comfort’. In most cases, the letters not only secured hospitality, but also conferred special social status. Norman’s letter of introduction to one planter elevated him, in his host’s eyes, from ‘stranger’ to ‘brother’.

By opening their estates to American guests, Cuban planter-hosts drew Americans into an economic periphery that included all manner of guides, drivers, providers of goods and services, and fellow planters. Although it is unclear whether the planter-host engaged actively with this community, it is clear that this community engaged with him and his guests in lucrative ways, often competitively. In true dragoman style, they had no shame approaching Americans to offer assistance—for a price. At Jaruco, a small rural settlement, Abbot counted no fewer than seventeen guides vying for his custom as he planned the next leg of his journey. In San Antonio de los Baños, Bryant was approached by a young man who suspected, correctly, that Bryant wished to visit one of the nearby

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Table 1. Social hospitality and commercial hospitality (Lockwood and Jones, ‘Managing Hospitality Operations’, 161). Used with permission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social hospitality</th>
<th>Commercial hospitality</th>
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<tr>
<td>Supply led</td>
<td>Demand led</td>
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<td>Occasional</td>
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<td>Small scale</td>
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<td>Self-administered</td>
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<td>Non-dedicated facilities</td>
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<td>Unique experience</td>
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<td>Personalised activity</td>
<td>Economies of scale</td>
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<td>Social experience</td>
<td>Service experience</td>
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<td>Not for profit</td>
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70 Abbot, Letters, 28.
71 Tyng, Stranger in the Tropics, 21–2.
72 Wurdemann, Notes on Cuba, 12.
73 Gibbes, Cuba for Invalids, 22. See also Howe, A Trip to Cuba, 50, 82, 180; Levis, Diary, 35; Samuel Hazard, Cuba with Pen and Pencil (Hartford, CT: Hartford Publishing, 1871), 22. Writing in her personal diary in 1832, Mary Gardner Lowell suggested that presenting letters of introduction was a recent practice made necessary by ‘the ingratitude which has frequently been displayed by those who have been treated with the utmost kindness’, New Year in Cuba: Mary Gardner Lowell’s Travel Diary, 1831–1832, ed. Karen Robert (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 82; Philalethes described a similar abuse of hospitality, Yankee Travels, 236–7.
74 Norman, Rambles, 32.
75 Abbot, Letters, 107.
"cafetales and needed transport. ‘We engaged him’, wrote Bryant. ‘He brought us [a volante] with two horses … A drive of four miles, through a country full of palm and cocoanut [sic] trees, brought us to the gate of a coffee plantation, which our friend … opened for us’.76 Jackson hired a guide for a trip to a sugar plantation, and was invited by the overseer and his wife into their home. At the conclusion of the tour she saw no money pass hands from the guide to the overseer, prompting her to remark later, ‘What arrangement the conductor of the party might have had with the overseer I do not know’.77 One may safely assume that the guide kept the payment for himself.

Perhaps the most interesting form of facilitation was found in Güines, an inland city some 30 miles southeast of Havana. As early as the 1840s, this community was tightly organised around American travellers, many of whom were passing through on their way to one of the dozens of coffee, tobacco, and sugar plantations that dotted the region. At the heart of this community was an individual called ‘the Consul’, whom Wurdemann described in detail:

No American, who passes a single day in this city, fails to make the acquaintance of ‘the Consul’, a sobriquet deservedly bestowed on a creole for his unremitting attentions to every stranger. Do you want a horse or a volante – do you wish to make any purchase, or find you have been cheated in one – are you desirous to visit a ball, the cock-pit, a plantation – in short, do you wish for anything in Güines, a few steps from the Mansion-house will bring you to a shoemaker’s shop where, amid his busy workmen, will be found the man who will supply your every want … His services are, it is true, not entirely disinterested; but one is amply repaid for the small commissions on the hire of his horses and volantes, by the knowledge that he is not subjected to extortion, and the right good-will with which he attends to all his interests.78

Unlike the Consul and others like him, who worked for pay, planter-hosts offered hospitality on a non-lucrative basis, and they continued to do so even after the railway increased commercialisation of the interior and diminished the need for their services. According to Gibbes, in the 1860s the most common mode of travel off railway routes was ‘by packages’.79 It appears that plantation hospitality never became part of this packaging. When Drysdale published his general interest guidebook in 1885, planters were still accepting letters of introduction and receiving guests on their estates, at no cost. The difficulties in reaching a plantation, he wrote, were ‘not so great as they seem, for the Cuban sugar planters are the most hospitable people in the world, and an introduction to some one of them is not hard to obtain’.80

It is unreasonable to suppose that the planter-host’s primary motivation for his acts of hospitality was altruism or even a love of entertaining. As a participant in the host–guest dynamic, he was guided by his own gaze, constructed by his own expectations, hopes, and fears with respect to the relationships he established. The next section explores the planter-host’s relationship with American guests in light of the host gaze and proposes several interlocking motivations for his hospitality.

76Bryant, Letters of a Traveller, 376.  
77Jackson, Winter Holiday, 41.  
78Wurdemann, Notes on Cuba, 96–7.  
79Gibbes, Cuba for Invalids, 29.  
80Drysdale, In Sunny Lands, 56.
6. Social and political dimensions

The hospitality practised by Cuban planter-hosts set standards of munificence that left American guests effusively grateful if not slightly overwhelmed. Abbot’s hosts lavished him with ‘no ordinary degree of courtesy’. The hospitality Norman received was ‘free, open-handed, whole-souled’. George Carleton insisted that the Cuban planter would ‘as soon think of taking pay for the air and sunshine you breathe in his house as for any amount of board, lodging, or attendance’. To be sure, the American tourists who visited Cuban plantations during the nineteenth century were hardly a unified group. As shown, the earliest plantation guests were primarily invalids; over the course of the century, this demographic grew to include ‘regular’ tourists who saw a plantation visit as one of many diversions the island had to offer. As would be expected, the planter-host’s gaze shifted with this changing demographic. This section proposes that his gaze was shaped not only by interactions with his guests, but also by his own social and economic interests, which were extensive.

The planters’ rich displays of hospitality were motivated, at least in part, by charity or a desire to be perceived as charitable. Indeed, Christian pilgrims on their way to places of sanctuary frequently had specific medical needs, thus blurring the lines for all involved between invalid travel and religious pilgrimage. In Spain, hospitality culture has been well developed since the Middle Ages. Starting in the 1200s, Spain was site to many Christian pilgrimages, the most renowned of which was the Camino de Santiago (Way of St James). So great was the spiritual, cultural, and economic importance of the Camino that King Alfonso × (thirteenth century) included, in his Siete Partidas [Seven Laws], provisions for Camino pilgrims as well as for people who lived along the route:

Those local inhabitants must, when pilgrims pass through their lands, honour them and guard them, since it is right for men who leave their native land, with goodwill to serve God, to be welcomed by others into theirs and be kept from wrongdoing, force, harm, or dishonour.

The laws also exempted pilgrims from paying tolls. Taken alongside the Fifth Work of Corporal Mercy of Catholic catechism – Give shelter to the pilgrim – these directives no doubt did much to shape Spanish sensitivity to the needs of the traveller. An 1868 primary teacher’s manual published in Madrid acknowledged that the number of pilgrims had decreased since the Middle Ages and redefined

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82 Norman, Rambles, 32.
83 George W. Carleton, Rambles in Cuba (New York: Carleton, 1870), 60.
84 In a study of invalid healing and culture on the nineteenth century French Riviera, Tania Anne Woloshyn proposes that the line between invalid and pleasure traveller was a blurry one, and the categories frequently overlapped. 'La Côte d’Azur: The Terre Privilégiée of Invalids and Artists, c. 1860-1900', French Cultural Studies 20, no. 4 (2009): 393. On this point, see also Frawley, Invalidism, 121.
85 Frawley, Invalidism and Identity, 121.
89 Spanish: dar posada al peregrino. See, for example, Pedro Salas y Trillas, Catecismo pastoral, y prontuario moral sagrado, 5th ed. (Madrid: Viuda é Hijo de Marin, 1801), 221.
'pilgrim' (*peregrino*) accordingly to include strangers traversing an area where traveller services were lacking. The good Catholic was to treat these ‘unfortunate travellers’ as if they too were pilgrims.90

The host role filled by Cuban planters in the nineteenth century afforded social advantages. American travellers were almost always well-to-do; this was especially true of invalids, as proper climatic treatment required an absence of weeks or months from the responsibilities of work and household – a feat for only the wealthy. Most Cuban planters were *criollo* (Spanish ancestry, native-born), and as such comprised the island’s landed elite.91 Their relationship with American guests was quite different from the typical dynamic in contact zones; in these settings, the relationship tends to be asymmetric, with the (foreign) guest wielding much greater wealth and influence than the (local) host.92 The social equality of planter-host and American guest was unique for the time and place, and prescribed unique social niceties and attentions. Social hospitality is one of many ways that elites celebrate and consolidate their status with other elites.

In seventeenth century Britain, for example, rural estate owners practised hospitality to rich and poor wayfarers indiscriminately, as a gesture of social responsibility. After the Civil War of 1643, however, wealthy Britons reserved their hospitality increasingly for fellow elites, as a way of consolidating their authority.93 In the British colonies, Southern planters ‘used hospitality’ to ‘claim their place’ in an emerging plantation elite and connect host and guest with what both perceived as the civilised world.94

In Spain, just as anywhere else, nineteenth century hospitality practices varied from place to place. In an 1868 guidebook that included a large section on Spain, Henry O’Shea noted that among Spanish elites, hospitality was structured around the *tertulia*, a high-brow social gathering whose ‘intimate’ nature made it somewhat inaccessible to visiting elites; this was especially true in Madrid.95 In the peripheral regions of Spain, however, hospitality was both more open and less structured.96 It is from these rural areas that the Cuban *criollo* typically originated; between 1800 and 1835, for example, the three largest categories of Spaniards departing Spain for Cuba were Catalonians

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90Lecciones prácticas a los niños, (Madrid: C. Moliner, 1868), 94. The extent of Catholic influence on the Cuban *criollo*’s way of life is, of course, difficult to measure. David A. Badillo points out that although the *criollos* generally identified as Catholic and most rural Cuban priests of the mid 1800s were *criollo*, Catholicism was weak outside Havana. *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 16.


(58%), Asturians, and Basques (each 14%). These migration demographics help explain why the Cuban criollo’s hospitality craft reflected a decidedly provincial, rather than urban, disposition.

Hospitality to American guests was not without challenges for the criollo, however. By mid-century, cultural and economic ties between the criollos and their elite American counterparts had expanded to the point that, as Pérez explains, ‘important sectors of the Cuban economy, no less than key representatives of local elites, had been integrated into and become dependent upon North American capitalist structures’, and had a ‘considerable stake in the North American connection’. In 1826, 783 of the 964 ships that called at Havana were of American origin. Intermarriage between criollos and Americans was commonplace, and many criollos sent their children to school in the United States. Criollos increasingly supported annexation. While the criollos saw that democracy and slavery coexisted comfortably in the United States, they were also aware that American slavery was the subject of heated debate and that abolitionism was on the rise. In more than one sense, plantation hospitality contrasted sharply with plantation slavery and, if not closely managed, would lose its appeal altogether. This was especially true for American guests from the North, who were the ones most likely to have abolitionist leanings.

What the travel writers typically found on Cuban plantations, however, was slavery in an innocuous, sanitised form. Howe, a New York abolitionist, found Cuban plantation slaves to be ‘in excellent condition’ with, ‘on the whole, cheerful countenances’. While crossing the island’s western region, Philalethes met a planter who, upon realising that Philalethes was a ‘Yankee’, invited him to his sugar plantation to show him ‘his principal amusement’: the ‘rearing’ of his ‘young negroes’, for whom he was always trying to ‘diminish the labors’. He also granted them one hour of prayer and reading each day. Abbot, a Bostonian who once stated that ‘all men are born free and equal’ and decried the ‘vices and miseries of slavery’, found slaves on a coffee plantation to be ‘fine looking’ and ‘of contented countenances’, eating ‘delicious food, and as much as they desire’. Although one master ‘sometimes’ ordered punishments of 200 lashes, Abbot wrote, he also nursed ‘the wounded’ with ‘great care’. Most strikingly, Abbot reported that ‘the lash is seldom applied; I have never seen it’. Apparently, he had no suspicion that what he witnessed might have been even partly staged for his consumption.

101 Pérez, ‘Cuba’, 75; Pérez, Cuba, 107.
102 Pérez, Cuba, 106–7.
103 Ibid., 107.
104 Howe, Trip to Cuba, 166–7.
105 Philalethes, Yankee Travels, 147.
107 Abbot, Letters, 54.
108 Ibid., 40.
W.M.L. Jay submitted that the ‘civil law of Cuba is kinder to the slave than ever our own was’. She went on to ask, however, ‘How is a plantation negro, working all day long under the eye and whip of a driver, and locked into quarters at night, to bring these laws to bear …?’ It was a legitimate question to which no answer was given.

In response to these intensive scrutinies, Cuban planter-hosts strove to lower the profile of slavery so that it was no less idyllic than any other feature of the plantation landscape. This was an act of boundary maintenance, in this case intended to shield the plantation-host’s culture and community from the wrong kind of attention. Indeed, the planter-host lived in perpetual fear that the realities of Cuban slavery might become known to outsiders. Manuel Barcia proposes that the criollos wished to portray to the world an ‘idyllic’ image of Cuban slavery as ‘humane and well-balanced’, in order to maintain slavery in Cuba and expand the transatlantic slave trade. Their livelihood crucially depended on it. After Spain officially banned the transatlantic slave trade in 1827, the price of slaves doubled between the 1840s and 1860s–1870s, as did the operating cost of a sugar plantation. Bailed out by Spanish capital, planters paid interest as high as 40%. Fresh slaves were supplied to planters at the average rate of 10,000 per year via a black market trade, the discovery of which would have spelt swift economic ruin for the criollos.

Whatever the planters’ motivation may have been for muting the manifestations of slavery on their plantations when outsiders were visiting, Hurlbert appears to have been the only travel writer who suspected that the slavery he witnessed was perhaps less brutal than elsewhere on the island, simply because he was present. The ‘frightful sights of any country’, he wrote, ‘are not easily seen by the casual traveller’.

7. Conclusion

Invalid travellers played a significant role in opening the Cuban interior to tourism. They were drawn to the interior not by the promise of exciting experiences but rather by the temperate climate. They were also driven from the city by a sense that it had ‘bad air’ not conducive to the treatment of acute or chronic illness. To reach the island’s interior, the invalid braved an overland road system that was, at best, rudimentary, and which no doubt posed a deterrent to the general tourist. Country plantation-estates typically offered the only decent rural accommodations, and with large supplies of labourers, horses, and carts, they were also opportune staging points for back-country travel. Naturally, invalid travellers turned to the predominantly criollo planters for help; locals with complementary resources and know-how stepped in to fill logistical gaps. While the

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109 W.M.L. Jay [pseud. for Julia Louisa Matilda Woodruff], My Winter in Cuba (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1871), 231. See also Dana, To Cuba and Back, 245; Richard B. Kimball, Cuba and the Cubans; Comprising a History of the Island of Cuba (New York: Samuel Hueston, 1850), 74.

110 Jay, My Winter in Cuba, 232; see also Gibbes, Cuba for Invalids, 93.

111 Chambers, Native Tours, 57.


114 Ibid., 176.

115 Pérez, Cuba, 106.

116 Hurlbert, Gan-Eden, 185.
planter-host facilitated access to the island’s interior, the American guest was brought into contact with rural economies, thereby stimulating the creation of economic infrastructures not directly dependent upon urban ones.

The criollo stood to gain from hosting in many ways, including as the outwardly if not inwardly moral ‘protector’ of the invalid ‘pilgrim’ and also as a member of a social elite increasingly tied to its American counterpart. As these ties gained in depth and breadth, the planter-host toned down the frank manifestations of slavery on his plantation to shield himself and his slaveholding peers from the scrutiny of outsiders, who might otherwise discern evidence of collusion with the illegal transatlantic slave trade, which sustained the criollo’s status and livelihood.

The exact role of the Cuban criollo in the political, social, and economic shifts of the nineteenth century is far from settled. Pablo Tornero states that the Cuban colonial model, imposed by Spain in collusion with the criollos, ‘frustrated any possibility of diversified economic development’ and resulted in Cuba’s ‘underdevelopment and dependency while mortgaging its future as a nation’.117 Ángel Bahamonde Magro and José Gregorio Cayuela Fernández accuse the Cuban criollo specifically of ‘withdrawal’ in the face of the advancing Spanish comerciantes and American capitalists.118 These assessments align with a general consensus that Latin American ‘big landlords’ were chiefly responsible for large-scale social and economic underdevelopment during the nineteenth century.119

Other studies suggest that the Cuban criollo did actively seek to bring about positive political, economic, and social change, even if mostly for himself and without major results.120 The present research refines this latter depiction of the Cuban criollo thus: intentionally or not, Cuban criollo hospitality to Americans during the 1800s contributed to the economic vitality of some outlying regions of the island, it did so from an early date, and it did so for the better part of a century.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the editors and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments. All errors are my own.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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