

## LIFESTYLE

Cuban socialism dances to its own drummer. Though housing is free, shortages mean three or even four generations might live under the same roof, which gets tight in a two-bedroom apartment. This also cramps budding love lives and Cubans will tell you it's the reason the country has one of the world's highest divorce rates. Gays and lesbians, who do not have the option of getting married and living with the family, are in a particularly difficult spot vis-à-vis their private affairs. On the flip side, a full house means there's almost always someone to babysit, take care of you when you're sick or do the shopping while you're at work.

Cuban women have been liberated in the sense that they have access to education and training of whatever sort they desire. In fact, women make up 66.4% of the professional and technical workforce. But, like everywhere, a glass ceiling still exists in some fields (eg politics) and the home is still largely the woman's responsibility, which translates to a 'double work day' – women go to work and then come home, to work. Thanks to specific governmental policies, such as one year guaranteed maternity leave and free day care, it's easier being a mother *and* a career woman in Cuba. Children are an integral part of life and kids are everywhere – the theater, church, restaurants and rock concerts. It's refreshing that Cubans don't drastically alter their lives once they become parents.

That women are turning to hustling to make some extra cash or attain baubles is disturbing. While some *jineteras* (a woman who attaches herself to male foreigners for monetary or material gain) are straight-up hookers, others are just getting friendly with foreigners for the perks

they provide: a ride in a car, a night out in a fancy disco or a new pair of jeans. Some are after more, others nothing at all. It's a complicated state of affairs and can be especially confusing for male travelers who get swept up in it.

Most homes don't have a phone or computer, infinitesimally few have Internet access and disposable income is an oxymoron. All of this has a huge effect on lifestyle. What makes Cuba different from somewhere like Bolivia or Appalachia though, is the government's heavy subsidies of every facet of life, especially culture. Consider the fact that in Habana there are some 200 movie theaters and a ticket costs two pesos (US\$0.08), or that a front-row seat at the Gran Teatro de la Habana costs 10 pesos (US\$0.40), rap concerts cost two pesos and a patch of cement bench at the ballpark is one peso (US\$0.04). Now if only there was the transport to get there. Still, with a set of dominoes or a guitar, a bottle of rum and a group of friends, who needs baseball or the ballet?