HAVANA, Cuba. – The appearance of the Historic Quarter of Old Havana is changing. Large buildings, some of them patrimonial, are being remodeled to be converted into more hotels that will join the existing ones already standing on these 1.24 miles of land.

Many people ask: “If existing hotels are not booked to capacity, why waste so many resources right now amidst the deep economic crisis?”

To stroll around centrally-located Paseo del Prado allows you to see the projects in progress. A very important one is Pasaje Payret, which occupies approximately 984 square feet. It is located on Paseo del Prado, and it is flanked by Teniente Rey, Zulueta and San José streets. The only structure that will not be demolished there is the famous Payret theater.
Behind this area, on Zulueta Street, lived author Guillermo Cabrera Infante when he first arrived in Havana with his family.

Another building that is being remodeled is La Metropolitana, which used to house corporate offices and law firms. The fourteen-floor building occupies half a square block and is flanked by O’Reilly, Aguacate and Empedrado streets.

La Corona cigar factory will also become a hotel. The site, which is next to the former Presidential Palace, spans 984 square feet. Only its façade is being utilized, and it will be called the Corona Hotel.

The largest of these remodeling projects involved the unused docks of the Customs building, with all of its support posts that allowed large ships to dock there. Except for a small section that welcomes the arrival of cruise ships— that haven’t been arriving for a long time—the final construction will be a kind of hotel with its own marina.

At the corner of Obispo and Cuba streets we find the majestic building that once served as headquarters for the Ministry of Finances and Prices. The Real Hacienda Hotel will be built there.

The area is already full of hotels. At Prado and Malecón boulevards lies the Paseo del Prado Hotel, which is now being run under the name of Royalton by the Canadian hotel chain Blue Diamond. Three hundred twenty-eight feet down is the huge Packard Hotel. On one side of the Fausto Theater, the Regis Hotel is being remodeled, and on the next corner, the well-known and very-large Sevilla Hotel.

Surrounding Central Park lies the Central Park Hotel; the Manzana de Gómez, today the Manzana Kempinksi Hotel; behind it the Plaza Hotel; and across the street the Inglaterra Hotel, the Telégrafo Hotel and the nearby Gran Hotel. Missing is, of course, the Saratoga Hotel, which was recently destroyed by an explosion.

Simple arithmetic tells us that in an area roughly 13 square blocks in size, or 4,265 feet, there are 11 grand hotels.

There are some hotels, like the Armadores de Santander, across from the Luz dock, the Ambols Mundos, on Obispo Street, where Ernest Hemingway lived for a while, the Florida Hotel, also on Obispo Street, and a few other small hotels.
The list would be endless if we list all the self-employed home and room renters, because everywhere you walk you find “For Rent” signs posted.

The Cuban government admits that at mid-year Cuba, had yet to reach one million tourists, and it expects to welcome 2 million by the end of 2022, a number that is not enough to reach full capacity in those hotels.

We need to point out that, following the late Fidel Castro’s own policy, foreign visitors used to be routed to the “tourism poles” in order to keep them away from the population and Cubans from being influenced –contaminated- by capitalist ideas. As a result, the bulk of hotels today are located at the beaches and keys around the island.

Almost every construction being done in Old Havana is being executed by military construction units that belong to the military conglomerate GAESA.

ARTÍCULO DE OPINIÓN
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