

Locals can spot an outsider in a second. Once a friend and I walked into La Casa de Los Trucos (The House of Tricks), an area shoploaded with gruesomely fun costumes. A woman murmured to a clerk, "Son americanos" ("They are Americans").

At Versailles, a well-known Cuban restaurant, a waitress instinctively brought us menus in English. Versailles is a Calle Ocho institution, a place where you can get a good meal of pork with black beans and fried bananas for less than \$10. Its floridly painted mirrors, chandeliers, and paper placemats give it the feel of a quirky American diner—except almost everyone speaks Spanish, and the menu includes side dishes like yucca. I asked the waitress to describe yucca. "It is," she begins, then smiles and shrugs, "como papas" ("like potatoes").

For the most part, adventurers who speak only English will find themselves staring into polite but bewildered faces in restaurants and shops. If this happens to you, smile and point at the menu or whatever else you're curious about. I pointed to and bought a ceramic evil eye for \$2.50 from a shopkeeper named Luisa. We could not communicate well enough to talk about the religion Cubans call *Santería* or its African roots, which are strangely entwined with Catholicism. But Luisa did manage to convey that I should hang the eye in my house to ward off, well, evil.

SOMETIMES YOU GET LUCKY AND SOMEONE steps up to translate, as happened with me at the El Credito cigar factory, also on Calle Ocho. Late on a Saturday afternoon, all the workers except one had gone. Seventy-six-year-old Jose Arbolaez sat quietly making cigars for himself. His tough, stained hands expertly rolled and trimmed tobacco on a block of wood in front of him. Through his employer, Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, I learned that Arbolaez picked up his trade when he was a boy in his homeland many decades ago.

Passersby often pause at El Credito's window to watch old ways continue. Call it a time warp, if you will. But according to Flum, "I'm not always sure it's a time warp I want to be in." For Little Havana is rather worn at the heels. Locals mention a crack-cocaine problem, and like any urban area, Little Havana isn't the safest neighborhood after dark. If you head there at night, go with a group and stick to the main streets. Night life is confined mostly to restaurants and a Calle Ocho theater called Teatro de Bellas Artes that offers Spanish concerts and plays.

So do your wandering during the day and early evening. Then you'll see just how much Little Havana harks back to another time, another place. Take newly renovated Domino Park, where old men



Smoking a cigar in front of the Bay of Pigs Memorial.

gather daily to gossip and play the game they knew in their homeland. Or the open-air fruit markets that sell coconuts and sugar cane.

Even the local McDonald's sells *café cubano*. But don't waste your 30 cents. Step outside. It tastes better at a counter on a street with a Spanish name. It tastes better where you can smell the cigars and hear the staccato beat of Little Havana. ●

For information on Little Havana, call the Little Havana Development Authority at 305-324-8127.

Ethnic Enclaves

To really delve into another culture—its traditions and music and food—spend some time in an old-world neighborhood.

THE SLAVIC VILLAGE (CLEVELAND)

In the 1870s Polish immigrants settled in a neighborhood they called *Warszawa*. Czech immigrants followed, and the two-square-mile area south of downtown became known as the Slavic Village.

Stroll down Broadway Avenue or Fleet Avenue today, and you'll still hear lively polka music. Learn the dance from the experts at the Brookstate Inn on Brook Park Road; the pub features live polka bands Saturdays from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.

At John's Cafe (3658 E. 52nd St.), Czech immigrants prepare and serve the meals. Chicken *paprikass*, cooked with paprika in a cream sauce, comes with dumplings for \$5.50. Zosia's (7801 Broadway) serves *pirogis*—fried dough filled with cottage cheese and sauerkraut—for \$2.75. For more information, call the Slavic Village Association at 216-271-5591.

LITTLE ATHENS (NEW YORK CITY)

Home to 60,000 Greeks, this 300-block area in the Astoria section of Queens is the largest Greek community outside the motherland. Food and specialty shops line the streets, but it's the music and dancing that set this neighborhood apart.

The Grecian Cave (31-11 Broadway) flies in top singers, belly dancers, and musicians from Athens to perform every night but Tuesday. Taverna Vrakra (23-15 31st St.) features folk dancing—on table-tops. Every weekend, manager Andreas Anastasiou does the Dance of the Glasses, balancing as many as eight glasses on his head.

To sample Greek cuisine, try the traditional *moussaka* (an eggplant-and-cheese dish) for \$8.50 at the Roumeli Taverna (33-04 Broadway). The fresh-squid platter there feeds three for \$8. For more information, call the Greek Cultural Center at 718-726-7329.

ADAMS-MORGAN (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

Adams-Morgan is not a haven for just one ethnic group. In this three-square-mile area above Dupont Circle in northwest D.C., Ethiopian, Jamaican, and Creole cultures mingle.

At Nomad's (2407 18th St.), you can buy a belt from South America, wrap it around a Thai sarong, and top off the outfit with an African hat. The earrings here come from all over the world. Hungry? Go to the Red Sea Ethiopian Restaurant (2463 18th St. N.W.), where people pick up their *yatakelete kiki* (spicy vegetables) with *injera*, a thin bread. The Montego Bay Cafe (2437 18th St. N.W.) serves Jamaican stew and curry chicken (\$6 to \$10).

For dancing, head to Kilimanjaro (1724 California St. N.W.), two clubs in one. A deejay plays reggae and South African records in Kilimanjaro proper (\$5 to \$8 cover), while Heritage Hall features live music by African bands (cover varies). For more information, call the Adams-Morgan Mount Pleasant Community Development Corporation at 202-797-0070.

LITTLE TOKYO (LOS ANGELES)

Both Japanese and American tourists wander this five-block neighborhood in downtown L.A., which is packed with grocery stores and seafood markets. Head over to the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (244 S. San Pedro St.) to watch actors perform the *Kabuki*, an ancient Japanese drama and dance.

At the 42 stores in the Japanese Village Plaza (327 E. Second St.), you can buy everything from kimonos to moderately priced sushi (at Sushi and Terri, Hama-Sushi, and Frying Fish). In the bamboo booths of Tokyo Kaikan (225 S. San Pedro St.), cook your own *shabushabu*—vegetables in broth—or have the chef whip up a chicken/shrimp-teriyaki combo. Dinner is \$14 to \$20; lunch, \$7. The Atomic Cafe (422 E. First St.), a Japanese diner open from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m., draws an alternative crowd for cheap American breakfasts and Japanese dinners (about \$5). For more information, call the Japanese Cultural and Community Center at 213-628-2725.

—Elizabeth Robbins