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Cuba's Rock Art Reveals Ancestral Magic, Rituals, and Life in Pre-Columbian Times

Rock art, a universal expression of ancient humanity, continues to illuminate the spiritual and communal life of Cuba's earliest inhabitants, according to Cuban archaeologists and cave explorers.

Luis Olmo Jaz, president of the Samá Speleological Group, told Prensa Latina that more than 300 prehistoric sites have been identified across the island, with Sancti Spíritus standing out for its wealth of petroglyphs and pictographs that speak to the daily lives, rituals, and cosmologies of Cuba's indigenous peoples.



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“These expressions of rock art are not random,” said Olmo Jaz. “They are linked to ritualistic practices, magical beliefs, and the survival needs of primitive communities.”

One of the most striking concentrations of these sites is found in Caguanes National Park, located in the northern municipality of Yaguajay. The park — declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve — includes the Guayaberas Wetland and the Cayos de Piedra, a chain of islets that host rare and diverse terrestrial and marine fauna.

Caves within the park contain pictographs suggesting not only aboriginal life and spirituality, but also possible early encounters with European colonizers, bridging two worlds in a single visual language.

Among the most significant discoveries is the Cave of the Knives (Caverna de los Cuchillos) on Cayo Salinas, where six geometric and abstract paintings were found — some resembling spiderwebs. These were uncovered in the late 20th century and are believed to reflect interactions between two pre-Columbian cultures.

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Nearby lies the Cave of the Children (Cueva de los Niños), discovered in 1941, where the remains of 13 aboriginal children, buried in a collective tomb with polished stone spheres, offer a rare glimpse into indigenous funeral rites. The excavation was led by Dr. René Herrera (1895–1968), a pioneering Cuban anthropologist and professor at the University of Havana.

Olmo Jaz emphasized the urgent need for further research and preservation, noting that these sites offer invaluable insight into Cuba's ancestral memory — one that resists erasure and continues to echo through subterranean walls in symbols, rituals, and sacred geometry

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The Culinary Diversity of Brazil: A Reflection of Its Cultural Identity

Brazilian cuisine is a mosaic of flavors that reflects the country's complex cultural history. With influences from Indigenous, African, and European cultures, Brazilian food offers a variety of dishes that vary significantly by geographic region, available ingredients, and local traditions.

One of the most emblematic dishes is "feijoada," considered the national dish. It is a stew of black beans cooked with various meats, especially pork, served with rice, farofa (toasted cassava flour), collard greens, and orange slices. Its origins are linked to the colonial era and it is now a national culinary reference.



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In the northeastern region, particularly in Bahia, dishes with strong African influence can be found. “Moqueca” — a fish or seafood stew prepared with coconut milk, tomatoes, onions, and palm oil — is one of the most well-known examples. “Acarajé,” a fried bean cake filled with dried shrimp and vatapá, is traditionally sold on the streets by women known as “baianas.”

In the southeast, “pão de queijo,” typical of Minas Gerais, is made with cassava starch and cheese. It has a chewy interior and a crispy exterior. Another common snack is “coxinha,” a fried dough shaped like a chicken leg, filled with shredded meat. “Vatapá,” a thick cream made from bread, seafood, coconut milk, and peanuts, is served as a side dish or filling.

The southern region is known for “churrasco,” a tradition of grilled meats served sliced directly on the diner’s plate, especially in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina.

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As for desserts, “brigadeiro” holds a prominent place. Made from condensed milk, cocoa powder, and butter, it is shaped into small spheres covered with chocolate sprinkles and is commonly served at celebrations.

Brazilian cuisine, with its blend of flavors, ingredients, and techniques, serves as a living testament to the history and diversity of the South America’s largest country.

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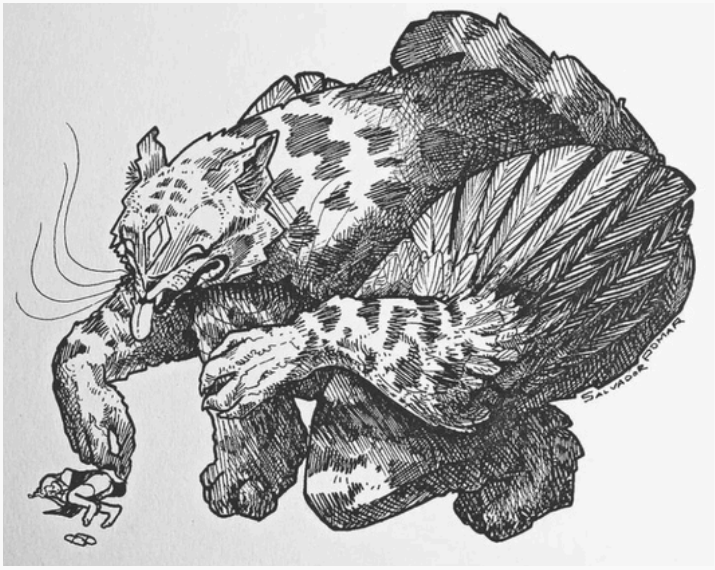
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Lari Lari: The Shapeshifting Spirit That Haunts the Andean Night

Among the high plateaus, misty lakeshores, and wind-swept Quechua territories of the Andes, tales persist of a mystical being known as Lari Lari — a creature of many forms and even more secrets.

Depending on the region, Lari Lari manifests differently. In the highlands, it takes the form of a feline with glowing eyes and a fiery reddish coat. Around the sacred waters of Lake Titicaca, it is described as a nocturnal bird, stealthy and seductive, known in some traditions as Jinchukkaño. In other areas influenced by Quechua cosmology, the entity is associated with natural phenomena such as the wind, evening light displays, and shooting stars.



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But it is not merely its shifting appearance that makes Lari Lari feared and revered. According to oral traditions, this creature is a master of transformation, capable of becoming a wildcat, a monkey, a snake, a dog, or even a human. Its voice mimics that of loved ones with chilling perfection, luring unsuspecting travelers deep into the night.

“It is known to imitate voices of friends and family,” says one version of the legend, “deceiving the innocent with charm and familiarity.”

Sometimes confused with the Guajojó, another mythic bird with a haunting human-like cry, Lari Lari goes beyond imitation. It is believed to possess the uncanny ability to read the past, present, and future, making it both feared and sought after by those desperate for insight.

Its song, soft and melancholic, induces sleep. And it is during this slumber that Lari Lari strikes. In the highlands, elders say it steals the soul or drains the heart’s blood of its victims, especially vulnerable women — the pregnant and those in labor — who are said to suffer mysterious hemorrhages attributed to its presence.

Among men, encounters with Lari Lari are said to result in violent nosebleeds, leaving behind dazed survivors who recall only fragments of a dreamlike encounter.

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Beyond its haunting characteristics, the myth of Lari Lari offers a window into Andean worldviews — where spirit, nature, and body intertwine, and where disease, death, and fate are seen as forces negotiated not only through medicine, but through cosmic storytelling and ancestral memory.

As with many Indigenous legends across Latin America, Lari Lari persists not only in whispered stories by the fire, but in dreams, illnesses, and unexplained moments of déjà vu — reminding the living that in the Andes, even the wind may carry a spirit's voice.

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Corn: A Treasure from Mexico to the World

Corn is much more than just a food in Mexico; it represents a rich history, tradition, culture, and national identity. This grain has been fundamental to the diet of Mexicans since ancient times, serving as the base for making tortillas, tostadas, and totopos, as well as delicious snacks like popcorn, elotes (grilled corn), and esquites (corn salad). Additionally, it is used in iconic dishes such as pozole and tamales.

Classified within the group of whole grains, corn retains its three essential components: bran, germ, and endosperm. These whole cereals are an excellent source of dietary fiber, which helps improve blood cholesterol levels and reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. They are also rich in B vitamins, iron, magnesium, and selenium, playing vital roles in the body such as forming new cells, maintaining a healthy immune system, and regulating thyroid function.



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The history of corn dates back approximately 7,000 years when ancient inhabitants of Mexico and Central America began domesticating the herbaceous plant known as “teocintle.” This process gave rise to corn as we know it today. Besides its nutritional value, corn was crucial for the economic and cultural development of Mesoamerican civilizations such as the Aztecs, Mayans, and Mixtecs.

Mexico is home to an impressive diversity of corn; it is estimated that 59 out of the 64 existing varieties in the country are native. In 2023, corn production exceeded 27 million tons, positioning Mexico as the seventh-largest producer worldwide. Currently, corn is the most consumed cereal in the country and is primarily grown in two varieties: white and yellow. White corn is exclusively for human consumption due to its high nutritional value, while yellow corn is mainly used in industrial processes and animal feed.

Globally, there are over 220 edible species of corn, and in Mexico alone, at least 600 different ways to prepare it have been documented. The word “corn,” derived from the indigenous Caribbean language (ea mays), means “that which sustains life,” reflecting its importance not only as food but also as a cultural symbol. Corn belongs to the botanical family Poaceae or Gramineae, which includes other important cereals like wheat, rice, and oats. Its significance transcends culinary uses; it is a fundamental pillar of Mexican identity.

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Viñales: A Natural and Cultural Treasure in The Heart of Pinar del Río, Cuba

Located in the province of Pinar del Río, in western Cuba, the Viñales Valley is much more than a tourist destination: it is a corner where nature and tradition merge into a landscape that seems frozen in time. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999, this valley is recognized for its unique geography, biodiversity, and deep connection to rural Cuban life.



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One of the valley's most distinctive features is its karst landscape, dominated by the imposing "mogotes"—limestone mountain formations with rounded tops that rise abruptly from the flat terrain. These unique reliefs in the region give the place an unparalleled scenic beauty that has fascinated visitors and scholars alike.

But Viñales is not just a visual spectacle. It is also home to a rich biodiversity, with endemic species of flora and fauna finding refuge in its trails, caves, and forests. Spaces like the Cueva del Indio or the Cueva de Santo Tomás not only offer stunning underground landscapes but also remnants of ancient cultures that inhabited the area.

Life in the Viñales Valley revolves around agriculture. Here, some of the finest tobacco in the world is cultivated, thanks to an agricultural tradition that has been passed down through generations. The "tobacco fields" and thatched bohíos create a human landscape that is an essential part of Cuban cultural heritage.

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Tourism has found in Viñales a balance between development and sustainability. Every year, thousands of visitors arrive attracted by outdoor activities—hiking, horseback riding, climbing—and by the opportunity to interact with local communities in private homes, taste Creole cuisine, and learn about tobacco cultivation directly from the farmers.

Viñales is, in essence, a living testament to the harmony between humans and their environment. A place where history, nature, and culture coexist in an uncommon balance, making this geographical space a true national treasure that Cuba offers to the world.

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