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**Night life in communist Havana an eye-opener**

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HAVANA-As the sun sets in this brooding jewel of the Caribbean, the streets of Old Havana never sleep.

At midnight, toddlers walk with their parents along avenues with no street lamps. Teens hawk cheap cigars to tourists.

And four-star restaurants and bars, many dating to the pre-Castro days, draw in customers from Italy, France and Spain with menus that have Western-style prices that keep most Cubans on the outside, unless they work there earning little more than tips.

Gov. Ryan's hectic schedule during his four nights in this historic district, where Ernest Hemingway, Joe Louis and Al Capone used to party, didn't allow him to sample much of the area's allure.

"When have I seen the night life?" Ryan said, when asked his thoughts about after-hours Old Havana.

Others who ventured out were given an eye-opening look at how communist Cuba parties, a sight few Americans have been permitted to see since Castro's rise to power 40 years ago.

Prostitution is allowed to exist near the main tourist draws with little interference from police. In fact, one member of the delegation who is not staying at Ryan's hotel told associates he had been flirtatiously bitten on the arm by a prostitute, with whom he had struck up a conversation. He wound up paying the woman $ 10 to go away.

Others saw firsthand how Cuba's night life is packaged to conform to the strict communist doctrine of Castro's government.

"One of the restaurants we stopped at, there was a very large gentleman by the door who we all thought was the owner. He was ordering chairs and tables to be moved around, and telling the waiters and busboys to hurry up," said John Glennon, president of Health Alliance and a member of Ryan's delegation.

"I asked our waitress if she knew that was the owner, and she didn't know what the word 'owner' was. Three or four of the bartenders and waiters had this little huddle back off to the side. She came back and said, 'By owner, do you mean is this his restaurant?' I said yes. She said, 'No, the state owns the restaurant. Nobody owns anything here. The state owns everything,' " Glennon said.

"It's kind of interesting. Here's a 24- or 25-year-old lady and you think of the system she's lived in for her whole life. She has no concept of an individual owning a restaurant," said Glennon, one of the architects of Ryan's Illinois FIRST program.