



### **Priority checklist**

- Passport (valid six months from your date of return to the US)
- Photocopy of picture page of your passport (pack separately)
- Money (refer to the section below for recommendations)
- First-Aid kit and prescription medications
- Confirmed flight itinerary (be sure to confirm your departure times)

### **Flexibility and Patience**

As with many travel experiences flexibility and patience are key to having a positive experience on your trip. Especially in Cuba, things are changing very rapidly. Your itinerary is subject to change, and your local guide will do their best to keep you informed and up to date with any changes in scheduled activities.

### **Cuba Visa**

All US citizens are required to have a tourist visa to travel to Cuba. You can purchase your visa at the airport when you check in for your flight to Cuba. As you check in to your flight at the airport, the attendant will ask you if you already have your tourist visa. Depending on the airline, she will either sell you a visa right there at the check-in desk, or she will direct you to purchase it at the departure gate of your flight. The airline staff checks each person before boarding the plane to see if they have their visa-it is not possible to board the plane without the visa. Depending on the airline that you are flying, the cost of the visa will be \$50-100. You can pay this with a credit card.

Your category of travel to Cuba will be People to People Educational Travel as your travel plans were made before June 5, 2019, but it's quite possible that this category is not a choice at the airport. If this is the case, please choose Support for the Cuban People as the category of travel.

While this procedure is very easy, if you would like to purchase your visa ahead of time and have the visa mailed to you, you can visit the website [www.cubavisaservices.com](http://www.cubavisaservices.com) to do so. The cost is \$85.

## **Luggage**

Please remember to pack all essential items in your carry-on bag, including medications. Checked luggage can be delayed, and we recommend packing as much as possible in your carry-on bag(s).

## **Immigration and Customs**

Upon your arrival in Havana, Cuba, you will clear immigration and proceed to baggage claim, where you will collect your checked bags, clear customs and continue to the arrivals hall. Here, you will be met by your guide and driver. Your guide will be holding a card with your group name or last name.

When passing through immigration in Havana, you should state the purpose for your visit as “Tourism.”

## **Money**

American credit and debit card usage was recently legalized in Cuba, but they do not work at this time. Most foreign bank cards are accepted in the larger tourist spots throughout the island; however, small merchants are likely not set up to handle such transactions. You will need to bring all the cash you plan on using for the trip. We recommend that you bring between \$75 to \$90 per day of your trip per person, keeping in mind that you’ll have several dinners on your own, and things like alcohol, souvenirs, Wi-Fi cards, and tips are not included.

The fixed exchange rate is: 1 USD = .873 CUC (Cuban Convertible Units, “*kooks*”). This is based on a 1 to 1 conversion rate and then a 13 percent tax is charged. This tax does not apply to certain other currencies so if you have Euros you may get a better rate. Your guide will help you exchange your money during the trip.

## **Tipping**

Tips are **not included** for your guide or for meals on your own. While by no means mandatory, if you feel they have added to the value of your experience you may want to offer a tip at the end of the trip. We recommend the following amounts assuming good performance:

- Guide: \$6-\$10 per person, per day
- Restaurants (for meals on your own): 10% (if a service charge is not included in the bill)
- Drivers: \$3-\$5 dollars per person, per day

Usually your guide and driver will prefer CUC but he or she will also accept US dollars.

## **Weather Conditions**

Although weather varies to a degree depending on the season, in general you can expect to be greeted by hot and humid weather – typically in the 80s, and slightly cooler at night. The rainy season runs from July through October, although it is not uncommon for the island to receive

short afternoon rain showers any month of the year. It is advisable to check weather conditions at your destination via online weather services the week before departure. This will help you determine which items to pack.

### **Electric Converters / Adapters**

Most of Cuba runs on 110 volts and 60 hz, although some modern European hotels will also have outlets of 220 volts. Most sockets in private homes will accommodate a North American two-pronged flat pin plug, so adapters are generally not needed. iPhones and android phones can be plugged into the electrical outlet directly in Cuba.

### **Connectivity**

In certain areas, access to cell phone coverage and Internet may be limited or nonexistent. Your cell phone will not work in Cuba, though now there are some providers providing roaming services. Please check with your cell phone provider. In order to avoid charges, we recommend turning off your cellular data and turning your phone to airplane mode. There are various internet hot-spots throughout the city, located in parks and sometimes hotel lobbies. The internet can be very slow and sometimes not work at all, and so it's best to advise your family and friends that you will be out of touch during your time in Cuba.

### **Room Safes**

While Cuba is a safe country with little crime, we recommend only carrying the cash you need for the day and a copy of your passport. We recommend leaving the majority of your cash and your passport in the room safe. When staying at private bed and breakfasts, some do not have safety boxes in their rooms. If you don't feel comfortable leaving your valuables in the house, you can always bring them and leave them in the van or bus, which will always be locked and guarded.

### **Bathrooms**

Bathrooms in Cuba can tend to be not as clean as we are used to in the United States. At certain stops along the trip it's possible that the toilets will not have toilet seats. Oftentimes there is a bathroom attendant whose job it is to make sure there is paper and soap for you. While the use of the bathroom is always free, it is appropriate to leave a small tip of 10-25 cents for this person. It's always also a good idea to travel with a small pack of tissues.

### **Special Food Needs**

The Cuban diet is heavy on rice, beans and animal protein (pork, chicken, fish, beef). We can arrange vegetarian plates at dinner and lunch with advanced notice, however if you have special dietary needs, we will need to know these in advance. Low-carb and gluten-free are difficult but not impossible to do in Cuba.

## **Snacks**

Snacks are not common in Cuba due to the size of the meals. Feel free to bring snacks like nuts, granola bars or trail mix if you know you like to nibble between meals, though plan for large lunches and dinners. Vegetarians and Celiacs in particular may want to bring along something to supplement their diet.

## **Water**

While many Cubans drink the tap water, we recommend only drinking the bottled water. Just to be prudent, we recommend using the bottled water for teeth brushing too. It is very important to keep well hydrated in Cuba as it can be warm and in the summertime it can be very humid. Many guests bring SteriPens, handheld water purifiers, and a water bottle, and they find this works excellent.

## **Safety**

Incidents of pick-pocketing are not uncommon in the cities where you will be traveling. Cuba is a very safe destination in general. Though incidents of theft are rare, they *can* happen. Most accommodations have safe deposit boxes in which you can leave valuables during your stay, but we urge you to leave expensive jewelry and other valuables at home.

## **Insurance**

Included in your charter flight is medical insurance that covers up to \$1,000 in medical emergencies. We highly recommend you purchase your own evacuation, trip cancellation and additional medical insurance. Allianz Global Alliance is a recommended insurance provider.

## **Packing and Clothing Suggestions**

When packing, please keep in mind: versatility, modesty, and ease for washing and drying if you do not plan to have laundry done by your hotel. Cuba is very casual in it's dress attire, and at no point will you need 'fancy' evening wear. Think cool, clean and comfortable. If you're male, common evening wear is a button down, polo, or a "Guayabera" shirt paired with khakis. If a female, many like to wear a comfortable sun dress and shawl for dinner. Speaking of which, comfortable walking shoes are a must! Make sure to bring a light sweater or jacket as sometimes temperatures cool at night, or air-conditioning can be especially cold. Please DO NOT bring along expensive clothing or jewelry or anything that, if lost or stolen, would upset you.

These items are meant to be helpful in your packing:

- Passport and a photocopy of the front page of your passport (with photo and information).  
Pack this copy in a separate bag.
- Copy of your Cuban itinerary.
- Any medication you use, packaged in their original containers
- Sun-hat or visor, sunglasses and sunscreen

- Travel sewing kit
- Small one-size detergent if you'd like to wash clothes in your bathroom. Laundry service is available in hotels and casas particulares.
- Small tissue packets
- Moist toilettes or bacterial gel (Not all bathrooms have soap available).
- Wash cloth (rare in Cuba)
- Small medical kit: Pepto Bismol, Immodium, powdered electrolytes, anti-acid, aspirin or Tylenol, band aids, antiseptic ointment, ibuprofen, etc.
- Camera & extra digital cards. Digital cards are not available in Cuba
- Ziploc plastic bag to protect camera
- Contact lenses kit, glasses (and prescription)
- Tampons or sanitary napkins
- Mosquito repellent containing DEET (In general there are few mosquitoes in Cuba but on occasion it is good to have repellent)
- Bathing Suit
- Luggage locks
- Sweater or light jacket for air conditioning / evening
- Casual lightweight clothing for daytime, good sun protection
- One pair of long pants and a long-sleeved shirt (Cuba is dress-casual, there is no need for dinner formal wear)
- Comfortable sundress or skirt
- Shorts (although many Cubans don't wear shorts often, they are acceptable to wear)
- Umbrella/parasol
- Toiletries and cosmetics
- Day pack or tote bag to use on walks and excursions
- Extra pair of glasses/contact lenses and cleaning solution
- Prescription meds in original bottles, with list of prescriptions in case of emergency
- Notebook to write down questions or keep notes if you'd like
- Small flashlight or headlamp

## Recommended Books

### Informational:

- ***Moon Handbook Cuba*** by Christopher Baker (2015)  
Baker's comprehensive, indispensable guide leaves no stone unturned, covering the natural, cultural and political life of Cuba. One of the best guidebooks on Cuba.
- ***Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*** by Julia Sweig (2009)  
Director for Latin American Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, Sweig traces the geography, history and identity of Cuba in this admirably succinct history of the island nation and its role in world affairs.
- ***Cuba Revelations*** by Marc Frank (2014)

An insightful, in-depth look at contemporary Cuba, written by a reporter who has lived in Havana for the last 25 years.

- **Havana** by Alfredo Jose Estrada (2007)  
One of my favorite books on Havana. A look into the rich history of this beautiful city. Estrada writes in narrative history form and can sometimes be too informational, but still it is a great read for anyone visiting this city.

#### Novels:

- **Dreaming in Cuban** by Cristina Garcia (1992)  
A short, poetic novel of three generations of Cuban women, their reaction to the revolution and the complex relation between those who remained in Cuba and those who settled in the States.
- **Waiting for Snow in Havana** by Carlos Eire (2004)  
A lyrical memoir of a privileged, eccentric boyhood 1950s Havana. Eire, a historian at Yale, fled with his brother to the United States in the wake of revolution.
- **The Old Man and The Sea** by Ernest Hemingway (1952)  
This is a classic, written by Hemingway while he was living in Cuba.
- **Our Man in Havana** by Graham Greene (1958)  
The story of a British vacuum cleaner salesman who gets accidentally drawn into cold war espionage with disastrous results.

#### Specific Topics:

- **Cuba and Its Music, From the First Drums to the Mambo** By Ned Sublette (2007)  
A thorough and entertaining history of Cuba and its music by the popular radio producer, music historian and cofounder of Cuban record label QbaDisc.
- **Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba** By Tom Gjelten (2009)  
Gjelten chronicles the rich intersection of power and politics, community and exile in contemporary Cuba through the saga of the Bacardi family. A fixture in making 1920s Havana a playground for the rich and famous in the prohibition era, Bacardi-and its proprietary yeast strain-famously left Cuba for Puerto Rico during the revolution.
- **The Sugar King of Havana: The Rise and Fall of Julio Lobo, Cuba's Last Tycoon** By John Paul Rathbone (2011)  
Another favorite of mine on Cuba. "Drawing on stories from the author's own family history and other tales of the island's lost haute bourgeoisie, *The Sugar King of Havana* is a rare portrait of Cuba's glittering past-and a hopeful window into its future."
- **Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba and Then Lost it to the Revolution** By T.J. English (2009)  
An interesting account of the Mob's role in Cuba in the 1950's and their subsequent descent and exit from the island after the revolution.

### **Travel Literature:**

- **Trader with the Enemy: A Yankee Travels Through Castro's Cuba** by Tom Miller (2008)  
Miller captures the openness, sensuality and pride of Cuba and the Cubans in this eloquent account of entertaining travels in Fidel's Cuba.
- **Enduring Cuba** By Zoe Bran (2008)  
Zoe Bran shares her experience traveling through Cuba with a natural history tour in early 2001. While there have been changes, many of her thoughts and insights remain true of Cuba.

### **Recommended Movies/Documentaries:**

- *Strawberry and Chocolate* (Fresa y Chocolate) (1993) Nominated for an Oscar, the film tells the story of two men in Cuba who fall in love with each other.
- *Before Night Falls* The life of Cuban poet and novelist, Reinaldo Arenas
- *Unfinished Spaces* Documentary describing the architecture of the Institute of Superior Arts in Havana \*Highly recommended.\*
- *The Man of Two Havanas* (2012) The documentary describes the life and happenings of Max Lesnik, a revolutionary who left Cuba and who has created uproar with his continual outspoken nature of the Revolution. An excellent documentary.
- *Suite Havana* (2003) Following the lives of thirteen ordinary Cubans as they set out about their day. The film has no dialogue and is a documentary.
- *Seven Days in Havana* (2012) Directed by Benicio Del Toro, the film is set in Havana and plays out a week for various individuals in the capital city.
- *Cuba and the Cameraman*, a light documentary about a traveler and his travels through Cuba that span a twenty year period. Available on Netflix
- *Seasons in Havana* A recent TV series available on Netflix about fictitious murder mysteries, but wonderful shots of Havana.

### **Local Representatives and Emergency Contact Numbers**

Emergency Contact in Cuba: Joslin Fritz +53 5517 0336

Local Guide in Cuba: **Mobile: #####**

Emergency Contact in US: Cameron 952-393-7419

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