

CUBA PRE-DEPARTURE GUIDELINES

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To take, and not

Permitted items. You can take photo and video cameras, personal DVD, PDA, CD and game devices, cell phones, laptops, MP3 players, a hair dryers, electric shavers, binoculars, radio receivers, musical instruments, and sound recording devices for personal use. If you take more than one of the above items, Cuban customs may ask if you intend to leave them on the island. If you intend to do so, duty may be charged.

If you take more than the equivalent of \$5,000 USD in cash, you have to declare it or risk confiscation.

Prescription medicines must remain in their original containers with labels intact.

Prohibited items. Narcotics, explosives, pornography, anti-Cuba literature, aerial drones, stand-alone GPS devices, walkie-talkies, and items considered to be weapons.

Toiletries

Although our 5 Star Hotel (Equivalent to most 4 Star Hotels in the U.S.), NH Capri, has almost every comfort of home, it would be a GREAT ideal to bring additional toiletries like a roll of toilet paper. We also recommend bringing your own towel should you decide to go to the beach. Also, face towels are not used as often in latin america. They use full body and hand towels more often. Consider bringing a face towel if you'd like that.

Dining

Most of our meals are covered. If you want a quick bite, however, there is a pizza and other snacks in the lobby and it's pretty good! There are also local ice cream shops and fabulous restaurants that you can try on your own. Explore and enjoy!

What to wear



See [What to take to Cuba](#). The page addresses climate, what to wear, suggested gifts for your new Cuban friends, and medicine and hygiene.

Mosquitos and gnats are a nuisance and torment visitors normally resistant to these pests at home. Bring repellent. We suggest nontoxic citronella oil.



Internet in Cuba



Internet and WiFi. You can take your laptop or tablet to Cuba without complications, but connecting to the internet is difficult and when successful slow. WiFi is available at five-star hotels including the NH Capri where we will be staying. Rates vary between 5.00 and 12.00 CUC (Cuban Convertible Pesos) per hour. Most hotels have computer terminals to rent from 5.00 to 10.00 CUC per hour. They operate at slow dial-up speeds.

Phones in Cuba

Our Havana office provides travelers with emergency highspeed internet and long distance telephone calls.

Cellular phones. If you want to use your cellular phone in Cuba, first check with your US carrier and ask if they provide this service. Verizon offers roaming services in Cuba. Alternately you can rent a SIM card for your unlocked cell, or a cell phone and SIM card from ETECSA at the Havana airport upon arrival. Cost to rent a SIM card is 3 CUC per day. Rent for a phone and SIM card is 9 CUC per day. You must prepay a minimum of 10 CUC for calls. You can add more money for more calling time. The process takes about an hour on arrival and again on departure. Please recognize that **IF YOU DO NOT KEEP YOUR PHONE WITH ALL CELLULAR DATA OFF you may be hit with huge data bills!** We don't assume to know how each carrier works but in general, and not specifically, keeping your phone on AIRPLANE MODE with the extra precaution of physically turning your cellular data OFF will help you manage unplanned costs. Again, PLEASE follow the typical recommendations of your cell phone carrier based on your travel needs. One way to stay in touch with friends and fellow travelers both in and outside of Cuba and back home is via the internet based calls i.e. WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.. Internet cards are available at the hotel and are pretty reasonable.



Landlines. The least expensive way to make international or local calls is on public ETECSA blue phones using ETECSA calling cards you must buy in Cuba. To call the US or Canada you must dial 119+1+(area code)+phone number. The cost is about \$2.50 per minute. For calls inside Cuba, you must dial 0+(area code)+phone number for about 5 cents a minute. If you plan use your hotel room phones consult with the front desk for rates – it can prove costly!

Gifts for Cubans

Cubans welcome gifts however small. Gift giving is an island tradition.



Donations for schools. Most needed items are pens, pencils, erasers, memory sticks, calculators, flashlights, markers, note pads, stuffed animals, games, dolls, toy trucks and cars. Also appreciated is toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo and good quality used clothing and shoes. Baseball bats, balls and gloves are very popular. Do not distribute donations on the street. Your guide will suggest schools and institutions most in need. Learn more at [Gifts and donations](#).

Personal gifts. While on your tour, you'll make many new friends. Consider small gifts such as aspirin, multiple vitamins, makeup, manicure and sewing kits, perfume, chocolate, watches, wallets, keychains, purses, scarves, jewelry, pen sets, flash drives, and other things you'd like to receive.

Bringing "donations" to Cuba. When arriving to Cuba, if you are asked about items you intend to leave behind by Cuban customs, describe them as gifts. If your luggage is searched and you are questioned as to why you're bringing 100 pencils (for example), say, "they are for friends" and leave it at that. The word donation raises concerns because, in the past, bad people have brought harmful things into Cuba as donations. In the unlikely event your gifts are confiscated rest assured they'll be distributed to Cubans in need. Luggage inspections rarely happen unless you bring excessive amounts of baggage or prohibited items.

Cuba allows you to bring 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of medicines and medical items as gifts without duty.

Laundry in Cuba

There are no public laundry facilities in Cuba. If you need laundry services, ask your chambermaid or hotel front desk. They'll give instructions for how to use this service. Generally the price is between 6 and 8 CUC for a plastic shopping bag of clothes. Ask the cost first.

Electricity in Cuba

Electricity in Cuban hotels is often 220 volts. We advise you purchase a Type 'C' European Travel Plug Adapter for electrical devices you bring to Cuba. These adapters can be purchased at Amazon, Walmart or at electronics or dollar stores. Some hotels use 110 volts, 60Hz (same as the US and Canada), but don't count on it. There are some plugs that are U.S. but they are not common. Please come prepared.



Type 'C' European Travel Plug Adapter

Time in Cuba



Eastern Time is observed across Cuba, as in Toronto, New York and Miami.

Upon arrival



We meet tour participants arriving and departing on tour start and end days at the Cuban airport and provide free transportation to your hotel.

If you are arriving early or departing later we help with airport hotel transfers. Cost is \$35 each way for two people.

Be kind, be on time

This one should be said TWICE! Cuba doesn't operate on "Latin time." If you are late for tour activities the whole group is held up. Cubans who have worked hard preparing your activities will feel very bad. And the whole schedule will get messed up.

Don't get angry if you miss the bus for our scheduled tours. We've instructed our guide and chauffeur to leave ten minutes after the agreed upon bus departure time for activities. Your guide announces the bus schedule the day prior. Your hotels have wake-up call services.

However, if you have to miss an activity, that's ok. Just tell your guide in advance so she/he will not worry or lose time looking for you.

Money matters

You must review our [Money matters in Cuba](#) page. It is essential for up-to-date currency, exchange and safety issues.

US credit and debit cards don't yet work in Cuba.

American Express travelers checks can be redeemed but is difficult and not dependable.

Suggestion. Carefully evaluate daily spending needs prior to departure. A minimum of \$100 per day is recommended. It is better to plan to take more money than to get caught short of funds.

If you require an emergency cash advance our Havana office will provide assistance.

Tipping Cubans

Feel good about tipping. When you give a tip to a Cuban the whole island benefits. Cuban tourist staff share tips with their co-workers and family who don't have access to them, and they all donate a portion of their tips to the national health, housing and education systems.

Hint. Treat tipping in Cuba as you do at home. Be generous with those who assist.

Here's the amount of tips most Americans give. You can always leave more.

Tour guide 8.00 to 10.00 CUC per day per person.

Tour bus driver 5.00 to 7.00 CUC per day per person.

Tour restaurants staff 1.00 CUC or 10% per meal per person.

Hotel porters \$1.00 per person or more if you have lots of luggage.

Chambermaids 1.50 CUC per day per person.

Museum guides and special guides 1.00 per person.

Taxi drivers 10% of fare.

Musicians at restaurants 1.00 CUC per person.

What about "gifting" in lieu of tips? Cubans in the service industry need money they can spend on the things they really need. They already get a lot of leftover toothpaste, toiletries and other stuff.

Safety in Cuba

Cuba is considered among the safest countries in the world with a very low crime rate. However precautions with personal belongings are necessary – do not leave things unattended. Don't wear expensive jewelry. It attracts pickpockets, which are a growing problem. Keep cameras and handbags secure to your person at all times.

Participants must use a lockbox at hotels for valuables, travel documents, air tickets, passport and cash.

An informative objective traveler's website is published by the [Government of Canada on Cuba](#).

Only carry the amount of cash you need each day. We suggest no more than 100 CUC. Leave the rest of your money in your hotel lockbox, along with your travel documents, valuables and passport. (Pass original is necessary to exchange money.)

Health concerns



While many foreign guests and Cubans have no problems with the water, we recommend you drink bottled water at all times. We supply bottled water on the bus during your excursions. We even recommend brushing your teeth with bottled water

A doctor or nurse is available to participants throughout the tour either at your hotel, at a nearby clinic or en route to destinations.

Vaccinations are, as of today, not necessary to visit Cuba. Please check our [Vaccinations for Cuba](#) page for updates.

Taxis and transport

Take official taxis only! Private cabs aren't worth the hassle, nor are they necessarily roadworthy or cheaper. And you risk theft.

What to expect

Everything is very different: language, climate, customs and demeanor.

Cubans are ultra courteous, effusive, candid and have a great sense of humor. All of the small material conveniences and services we take for granted are absent on every level in Cuba. While Cubans are punctual delays are common because of transportation and communications problems. Yet the latter is not typical for our programs.



Extreme shortages of everything require great innovation. Cubans have risen to the task. We advise going with the flow with eyes wide open until you get a lay of the land. Patience and understanding are the watchwords.

Words from wise travelers. If you go to Cuba looking for problems you will be all consumed, as they exist in abundance. On the other hand, if you go with an open mind and in the spirit of learning about a wonderful people and their unique society and culture your journey will be unequalled. Cubans are as thrilled to have you as their guest as you are about getting to know them.
